

THE RISE OF THE NGUYỄN DYNASTY AND CHANGE IN
THE POWER PARADIGM OF EARLY NINETEENTH
CENTURY MAINLAND SOUTHEAST ASIA

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ตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ภาคพื้นทวีปตอนต้นคริสต์ศตวรรษที่ 19

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เลียม วู คี : การขึ้นสู่อำนาจของราชวงศ์เหงียนและการเปลี่ยนแปลงกระบวนทัศน์แห่งอำนาจในเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ภาคพื้นทวีปตอนต้นคริสต์ศตวรรษที่ 19 (THE RISE OF THE NGUYEN DYNASTY AND CHANGE IN THE POWER PARADIGM OF EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY MAINLAND SOUTHEAST ASIA) อ.ที่ปรึกษาวิทยานิพนธ์หลัก: รศ.ดร.สุเนตร ชุตินธรานนท์, อ.ที่ปรึกษาวิทยานิพนธ์ร่วม: รศ.ดร.มนตรี ราโท, 185 หน้า.

วิทยานิพนธ์นี้ได้ศึกษาพัฒนาการทางการเมืองที่เกิดขึ้นพร้อมกันซึ่งเกี่ยวกับบทบาทสุดท้ายของรัฐโบราณตามลุ่มแม่น้ำโขงไม่ว่าในแง่ของการแพร่ขยายซึ่งรวมอำนาจเข้าสู่ศูนย์กลาง การจัดระเบียบใหม่เชิงพื้นที่ และการสร้างความร่วมมือกับกลุ่มชาติพันธุ์และรัฐราชล้อมต่างๆก่อนการเข้ามาของลัทธิล่าอาณานิคมซึ่งได้ถูกสร้างขึ้นเป็นกรณีศึกษาที่เกี่ยวข้องผ่านการเชื่อมโยงรูปแบบโครงการสร้างรัฐแบบใหม่ ปรากฏการณ์นั้นได้นำไปสู่การพัฒนาพลวัตทางการเมืองและภูมิรัฐศาสตร์แถบลุ่มแม่น้ำโขงโดยการสร้างรูปลักษณ์ที่ทันสมัยของภูมิภาคจากสองรัฐมหาอำนาจสำคัญไม่ว่าจะเป็นเวียดนามและสยามโดยได้สร้างโครงสร้างพื้นฐานและสถาบันแห่งรัฐอย่างไม่เคยเกิดขึ้นมาก่อนในพื้นที่ที่มีความซับซ้อนและเป็นพื้นที่ชายขอบ

การพิจารณาบริเวณลุ่มแม่น้ำโขงเป็นพื้นที่ที่มีการบูรณาการทั้งทางการเมืองและทางสังคม ทั้งๆที่มีภูมิประเทศด้านกายภาพและด้านวัฒนธรรมที่แตกต่างกัน การมีปฏิสัมพันธ์กันระหว่างกลุ่มชาติพันธุ์กับดินแดนต่างๆได้สร้าง “กระบวนทัศน์ว่าด้วยอำนาจ” ที่แน่นอนของความสัมพันธ์ทางการเมืองซึ่งถูกเรียกว่าเป็น “สนามแห่งอำนาจ” ซึ่งได้ถูกดำเนินการอย่างมากมายโดยความสัมพันธ์เชิงอำนาจแบบดั้งเดิมที่มีหลากหลาย “เครือข่ายของความจงรักภักดี” ผ่านการเป็นเครือญาติและรูปแบบของรัฐศูนย์กลางและรัฐราชล้อม อำนาจรัฐกล่าวได้ว่าเป็นการดำรงอยู่ของพื้นที่ทางการเมืองที่มีได้เป็นพื้นที่เดียวกันและรักษาพื้นที่ซึ่งถือว่ามีความกำกวมและไม่สามารถระบุได้ตามชายแดนของรัฐมหาอำนาจ กระบวนทัศน์ว่าด้วยอำนาจดังกล่าวได้ถูกท้าทายอย่างยิ่งยวดทั้งรัฐสยามและเวียดนามในช่วงต้นศตวรรษที่ 19 ไม่ว่าจะเป็น การสร้างโครงการต่างๆ เพื่อมุ่งสู่รูปแบบความทันสมัยของการสร้างรัฐแบบใหม่ที่รวมอำนาจเข้าสู่ศูนย์กลาง จุดจบของความสัมพันธ์เชิงอำนาจแบบดั้งเดิมจึงถูกเปลี่ยนใหม่ด้วยการแทนที่ของการจัดการเชิงปริมาณและพื้นที่ปกครองโดยตรงจากรัฐศูนย์กลางผ่านโครงสร้างทางภูมิรัฐศาสตร์แบบใหม่ทั่วลุ่มแม่น้ำโขงโดยการออกแบบของรัฐที่มีอำนาจมากขึ้นเรื่อยๆซึ่งไม่เคยเกิดขึ้นมาก่อน

สาขาวิชา เอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ศึกษา

ลายมือชื่อนิสิต.....

ปีการศึกษา 2555

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VU DUC LIEM: THE RISE OF THE NGUYỄN DYNASTY AND CHANGE IN THE POWER PARADIGM OF EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY MAINLAND SOUTHEAST ASIA, ADVISOR: ASSOC. PROF. SUNAIT CHUTINTARANOND, Ph. D., CO-ADVISOR: ASSOC. PROF. MONTIRA RATO, Ph. D., 185 pp.

This is a study of simultaneous political development during the last chapter of “traditional” state of the Mekong valley in terms of centralized expansion, spatial territorialization, and ethnic and peripheral cooperation prior to the coming of colonialism. It is constructed as a series of related case studies, connected by the theme of early state making project. The phenomenon evoked dynamic political and geopolitical development along the Mekong valley in shaping modern contours of the region by two main players of Vietnamese and Siamese who unprecedentedly produced state infrastructure and state institution into the complex terrain and margins.

Given the Mekong valley as an integrated social and political space regardless of diverse physical terrains and cultures, interaction between ethnics and principalities created a certain “power paradigm” of political relationship which is described as “a field of power”. The field was dominantly run by various form traditional power relationship, “network of loyalty”, kinship, and central-peripheral model. State power recognized the existence of this inhomogeneous political space and maintained vast area of ambiguity and unidentification along the frontier of core-state. Such power paradigm has been severely challenged by early nineteenth century Vietnamese state making project in order to approach closer to modern form of centralized state establishment. The extinguishment of traditional power relationship and replacement of directly territorial and administrative management from center gradually and fundamentally produces a new geopolitical structure throughout the Mekong region by design of unprecedented emerging state.

Field of Study: Southeast Asian Studies

Student’s Signature:

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LISTS OF ABBREVIATIONS

DNNTC	Đại Nam nhất thống chí	Gazetteer of Imperial Dai Nam
DNTL	Đại Nam Thực Lục	Primary Compilation of the Veritable records of the Imperial Dai Nam
DNLT	Đại Nam liệt truyện	Primary Compilation of Biographies of Imperial Vietnam
GDTTC	Gia Định thành thông chí	Gia Dinh Gazetteer
HLNNT	Hoàng Lê nhất thống chí	The Unification Records of the Imperial Le
HVNTDDC	Hoàng Việt nhất thống dư địa chí	The Geographical Records of the Unified Imperial South
KDDNHDSL	Khâm Định Đại Nam Hội Điển sự lệ	Official Compendium of Institutions and Usage of Imperial Dai Nam
LTHCLC	Lịch triều hiến chương loại chí	A Reference of book of the Institutions of successive Dynasty
LTTK	Lịch triều tạp kỷ	Miscellaneous Records of Successive Dynasties
MMCY	Minh Mạng Chính Yếu	Essential Records of Minh Menh
MTGP	Hà Tiên Trần Hiệp Trần Mạc Thị Gia Phả	The Genealogy of the Mac Family in Hatien
NCLS	Nghiên cứu Lịch sử	Journal of Historical Studies
PBTL	Phủ Biên Tạp Lục	Chronicles of the Prefectural Borders
PDDDC	Phương Đình dư địa chí	Phuong Dinh Gazetteer
QTCBTY	Quốc triều chính biên toát yếu	Summary of the primary compilation of the present dynasty
SGGD	Sài Gòn Gia Định qua thơ văn xưa	Sai Gon Gia Dinh through the view of Ancient Literature

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“Kep pak sai sa, kep kha sai muang”

Put vegetable in the basket, put people in *muang*

---Thai proverb

Rationale

This is a study of simultaneous political development during the last chapter of “traditional” state in the Mekong at the edge of modernity in terms of changing geopolitics, peripheral cooperation, and territorialization of space. Its main theme illuminates a series of political and economic phenomenon taking place along the Mekong involved with Đai Nam and Siam which are believed to have shared the same spirit of political transformation under the project of early modern state-making.

Part of the story possibly took root by the late eighteenth century elsewhere in the mainland. In 1785, the eldest son of Burmese king Bodawpaya took 30,000 men crossing the Arakan Yoma Mountains, the Arakan kingdom then was captured and its thousand year history as an independent polity finally came to an end. The conquerors divided their new territory into four governorships, each backed by a garrison. Three decades later, between 1819 and 1823, several extensive campaigns launched by Bodawpaya’s grandson, Bagyidaw, by which, the Burmese kingdom then extended to the Manipur valley and the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. In the heart of the mainland, in March 1827, Siamese general, Mom Chao Thap led the Senaborirak army with the order of Rama III of Siam to place Vientiane, “the city as populous as Bangkok”, with wild animals, and leaving nothing behind but weeds and water.¹ All its population was then in a massive re-settlement in the present-day Thai side of the

¹ Chao Phraya Thiphakarawong, The Royal Chronicle of the Third Reign of the Bangkok Dynasty (in Thai) (Bangkok: Khuru Sapha, 1961), pp. 64, 75

Mekong, and in the next few years, the Thai brought all the former Vientiane territories under direct administration.² To the east of Bangkok, Siem Reap and Battambang were entirely cut off from jurisdiction of Udong/Phnom Penh and were incorporated into Siamese politico-economic system.³ In the Malay Peninsula, small polities in southern Thailand long been considered as locating at the frontier of the “*Thai South and Malay North*” then became targets of Siamese extensive campaigns in continuous attempt of direct control.*

In the eastern side of the Mekong valley, in 1834, Vietnamese general Trương Minh Giảng entered Phnom Penh, set up *Trấn Tây thành* [the Western Comandery], and placed the kingdom into 25 districts and prefectures following the Vietnamese administrative system. The conquerors brought along with claim that it was the time for barbarians to be civilized and to act like Vietnamese.⁴ Not surprisingly, the conquest coincided with Ming Mạng’s administrative reform sweeping throughout the kingdom of Đại Nam by which various forms of traditional politics, political layers of space, and inhomogeneous power relationship were standardized by the centralized standardization. The Cham lost their last kingdom in central Vietnam in 1832. The

² See Vella, *Siam Under Rama III*, (1957); David K. Wyatt, *Siam and Laos, 1767-1827*, *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Sep., 1963), p. 13; Mayoury Ngaosyvathn and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn, *Lao Historiography and Historians: Case Study of the War between Bangkok and the Lao in 1827*, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Mar., 1989), pp. 55-69

³ John Crawford, *Journal of an Embassy to the courts of Siam and Cochin China*, Intr., David K. Wyatt, (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 446-47; Puangthong Rungwasdisab, *War and Trade: Siamese Interventions in Cambodia, 1767-1851*, Ph. D dissertation, University of Wollongong, 1995, chapter 7

* For further discussion, see Damrong, “Historical Background to the Dispatches of Luang Udomsombat”, in Luang Udomsombat, *Rama III and the Siamese Expedition to Kedah in 1839*, p. 2, Lorraine M. Gesick, *In the Land of Lady White Blood: Southern Thailand and the Meaning of History* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1995); *A plural peninsula: historical interactions among the Thai, Malays, Chinese and others*, workshop proceedings, Organised by Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, Regional Studies Program, Institute of Liberal Arts, Walailak University, Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University [Nakhon Sri Thammarat : Regional Studies Program, Institute of Liberal Art, Walailak University, 2004], Patrick Jory and Michael J. Montesano, eds., *Thai South and Malay North: Ethnic Integrations on a Plural Peninsula* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008); Suphaphorn Tunslaruk, *The Role of Chao Phraya Nakhon Si Thammarat in Relation to the Central Government and Southern Provinces of Siam during the Reigns of Kings Rama II and Rama III* (in Thai), M.A Thesis, Department of History, Chulalongkorn University, 1977, Udomsombat, Luang, *Rama III and the Siamese expedition to Kedah in 1839: The Dispatches of Luang Udomsombat*, trans. Cyril Skinner, ed., Justin Corfield (Clayton, Victoria: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1993)

⁴ See *Trấn Tây Phong Thổ Ký* (2007), *Minh Mệnh chính yếu* (hereafter MMCY),

northern and southern region of Đại Nam appeared as provinces [tỉnh 省] under Hue's control rather than two previous semi-autonomous kingdoms of the Northern and Gia Định citadels (Bắc thành and Gia Định Thành). The move would experience by the most popular and severe peasant and ethnic rebellions which ever occurred throughout the Ming Mạng's empire, some thirty-seven revolts in a single year of 1833.⁵

Such eventful political phenomena placed the Mekong Valley in a fundamental geopolitical reconstruction as a result of the *longue durée* political fragment, economic expansion and demographic growth of the eighteenth century. Centralized state-making extensively moved to the areas of long autonomy or considering as periphery and margin of main state either due to its complex terrains or to its geopolitical overlapping. Chiang Mai, for instance, was engaged with centuries of such triangle powers of Siamese, Lang Sang and Burmese before Lao *muang* were divided in three main polities of Champassak, Vientiane and Luang Prabang, and the Burmese lost their influence in Laos for the last time in 1798. By this mean, main principality in northern Thailand had very little choices, but to be the target of Bangkok's expansion.

The Lower Mekong, however, captured a distinct perspective in which the complex terrain of swamp and jungle were considered as huge challenges for any attempt of state-making, regardless of the Vietnamese or the Khmer. Colonial historiography described those obstacles went beyond the capacity of traditional kingdoms of Đại Nam or Cambodia to control and exploit those vast lands of the Plain of Reed (Đồng Tháp Mười) and the Long Xuyên Quadrangle (Tứ giác Long Xuyên) of Long Xuyên, Châu Đốc, Hà Tiên and Rạch Giá. Even in 1943, a colonial official in Châu Đốc admitted that “the Plain of Reeds is like a gross ulcer on the flank of Cochinchina. Its reduction is absolutely necessary for public order.”⁶ For those beliefs, efforts of the Nguyễn to conquer this specific space seem to have been

⁵ Nguyễn Phan Quang, *Phong trào nông dân Việt Nam*, p. 6

⁶ Tòa đại biểu chính phủ Việt Nam (TĐBCPNV) (Records of the delegate of South Vietnam), File H 62-7, “*Administrateur de la Province de Chau Doc a Mr le Gouverneur de la Cochinchine. 1 Oct 1943*” Vietnam National Archives Center No. 2 (VNA2), Ho Chi Minh City

overlooked or underestimated and areas outside of Sài Gòn were invisible on the early nineteenth century geopolitical map because they were simply marginal, amorphous, and amphibious. Colonial narratives, therefore gave exaggerated credit to the French's "civilizing touch" whose imagination often illustrated the pre-colonial Lower Mekong Delta landscape as a vast solitude yet to be reorganized through their hydraulic technology. Pierre Pasquier, the Governor-General of French Indochina spoke at the inauguration ceremony for a new canal in the western Mekong Delta for this colonial spirit:

“What brighter proof of the continuity and benefit of our policies than this hydraulic management of Cochinchina, pursued since the first days of the conquest, continuing 60 years without pause to realize a plan that provides, by a network of canals extended by our engineers in the Mekong and Donai [sis] Delta, development for the benefit of the Annamite [Vietnamese] people from these alluvial soil, heavy with silt, heavy with their future crops...”⁷

However, the French colonial image of the Lower Mekong is not that simple. Before the coming of French, historical landscape of the delta's waterway is far more complex and sophisticated than what suggested by the colonial view. A large number of colonial projects were fundamentally built based on Nguyen's works in the early nineteenth century.⁸

Recently, in the same spirit, scholarship on the early modern Lower Mekong Delta introduces an intriguing concept for the southwest Indochina based on the belief that those people living around the region have long considered it as “frontier or border” (Thai: khet, khopkhet; Khmer: can; Vietnamese: biên 邊).⁹ Dominated by nature landscape of amphibiousness and sparsely settled coasts, the region is described as a space of empty power in at least some three hundred years before the

⁷ Inspection Generale des Travaux Publics, Dragages de Cochinchine: Canal Rach Gia-Ha Tien (Sài Gòn: n.p., 1930), pp. 6-7, trans., David Biggs, in “Problematic Progress: Reading Environmental and Social Change in the Mekong Delta”, Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Feb., 2003), pp. 77-96, idem, Quagmire: Nation-Building and Nature in the Mekong Delta (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2010), Brocheux, Pierr, The Mekong Delta: Ecology, Economy, and Revolution, 1860–1960 (Madison, WI: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1995)

⁸ David Biggs, “Problematic Progress”, p. 77

⁹ Li Tana and Nola Cooke, eds., Water Frontier, (2004), p. 1

emerging Siam and Dai Nam. Thus economic and political traits of the area were characterized by the fluid human mobilization and empty labels of ethnicity, the emergence of Chinese diasporas, international trade and political autonomy. Even until the early nineteenth century, “the hands of states were anything but invisible.”¹⁰ Narrative of “Water Frontier” is vivid and intriguing despite the fact that it seems to persuade the reader that “centralized state” had no “visible” role to play to engage with its uniqueness of social, demographic, economic, and political change.

However, the view recently has been debunked by increasing scholarship on state factor in creating regional political coherence. Victor Lieberman points out in the same period of time of early nineteenth century, Siamese and Vietnamese central state were de facto main player in the Mekong valley.¹¹ And therefore it is possible to argue that the hands of state were no longer invisible but to directly involve both economically and politically. The Nguyễn Court, for instance, in the reign of Minh Mạng controlled the price of rice in the Lower Mekong twice a month, built canals, roads to connect its military system, and offered Vietnamese as *lingua franca* for all those barbarians throughout the region.¹²

Generally speaking, this period of transition between traditional and colonial mainland is significantly overlooked under the impact of colonial historiography in which the “law of Asian inertia” presents no change of indigenous society and makes no progress on Chinese or Indian civilization through a thousand years until the westerners came with modernized institutions.¹³ On the other hand, the period has

¹⁰ Li Tana, “The Water Frontier: An Introduction”, in *Water Frontier*, pp. 1, 5, 10-11. A same voice, but in a broader context can be also found in Anthony Reid, ed., *The Last Stand of Asian Autonomies* (London: Macmillan, 1997)

¹¹ See Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*, Vol. 1 (2003)

¹² Choi Byuing Wook, *Southern Vietnam Under the Reign of Minh Mang* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2004), pp. 101-129

¹³ See G. E. Harvey, *A History of Burma* (London, 1925, rpt. 1967), p. 249. Similar perspectives also can be found in D. G. E. Hall, *Early English Intercourse with Burma, 1587–1743* (1928; rpt., London, 1968), 11–12; W. A. R. Wood, *A History of Siam* (London, 1926); Etienne Aymonier, *Le Cambodge*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1900–1904), I, pt. 2. In case of Vietnam, see A. Schreiner, *Les institutions annamites en Basse - Cochinchine avant la conquete francaise*, 3 vols. (Sài Gòn, 1900-1902), I, 53–54, Cf. C. B. Maybon, *Histoire modern edu Pays d’ Annam* (Paris, 1920), P. Pasquier, *L’ Annam d’ autrefois* (Paris, 1907); and discussion in Nola Cooke, “*Colonial Political Myth and the Problem of the Other: French and Vietnamese in the Protectorate of Annam*” (Australian National Univ. Ph.D. diss., 1991)

been underestimated by national historiography due to the belief that rulers like in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia had failed to face the quest of modernity and led their country to be extremely vulnerable for colonial expansion. Subsequently, any recognition of change has been denied academically. As a result, the first half of nineteenth century mainland is a long-lost chapter of regional history in which Cambodia and Laos were described in the “dark age”, Vietnam was in time of chaotic feudal society, and Siamese historiography is isolated and closed itself within the framework of “old Siam”.*

This thesis aims to shed light to part of this lost chapter by unfolding political movement along the Mekong valley as a way Vietnamese, and Siamese to extents, responding to quest of colonial threat, emerging economy, demographic fluidity, political centralization, and territorialization of space. It is admitted that although not all of these responses came to success, many were on its way to shape the contours of modern geo-politics and their significance could not be obviously neglected. Among important keys for understanding political integration in the mainland is to illuminate the agenda of the Mekong basin as a political entity.

The river itself presents as a socio-political corridor dividing two main domains of Siam and Đại Nam where in the first half of the nineteenth century was full of constant confrontation and political rival to govern and annex new land. As buffer states, political fragmentation in Laos and Cambodia offered vivid examples of how early modern state-making destroyed traditional power network and brought new institutions of direct administration and territorial re-organization. In response, from the local perspective, local struggles in Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Champassak, Malay Peninsula, Cambodia and many places in Vietnamese highland against centralization shed light upon a possible forms of “pre-nationalist movement” by those who were in fear of losing identity, autonomy and being assimilated. The rebellion of Chau Anu to reunify Lao *muang* from Bangkok influence, the Khmer

* For further discussion, see David Chandler, Cambodia before French: Politics of A tributary kingdom (1973), idem, A History of Cambodia (2008); David K. Wyatt, Thailand: A Short History (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2008); Trương Hữu Quýnh, Phan Đại Doãn, Lê Mậu Hãn, eds., Đại Cương Lịch sử Việt Nam [A Summary of the History of Vietnam], 3 vols. Hanoi: The Education Publishers, 2006

response to Vietnamization's policy, and the Malay revolts of Songkhla, Patani, Kedah show the large scale of impact can be found regarding to the expansion of Vietnamese and Siamese central state. The phenomenon however is not simply to draw a clear boundary between the hill peoples of *Zomia* and valley kingdoms,¹⁴ rather than a process in which state expanding its full sovereignty could be experienced in various forms, physical terrains and diverse socio-economic structures.

Due to the fact that since 1824, the first Anglo-Burmese War resulted in the Burmese loss of the Lower Irrawaddy delta, the kingdom in fact was no longer a main power in the mainland, this thesis therefore takes the main focus on two other political players [big states, *phramahanakhon* in Thai] in the Mainland, Siam and Đai Nam, those who constantly struggled with each other along the Mekong basin. It is believed that this confrontation is the mainstream of regional politics and the hope is that by going beyond our traditional interpretation to this conflict neither between a Buddhist King (Cakkavarin) and a Confucian King [Son of Heaven] but the clash between two early modern state-making projects.

By using such traditional political narrative, study of the Vietnamese past has been largely neglected early nineteenth century as a transitional period. At the regional level, there also is very little scholarly recognition to the emerging central state and their unprecedented attempt of expansion, regardless of their success or failure. My focus is principally on explaining a series of significant political events that took place in Vietnam and mainland Southeast Asia during the first half of nineteenth century. This new landscape witnessed the emergence at the same time of three political domains of Siamese, Burmese and Vietnamese who presented as key players in shaping the mainland at the edge of modernity. What is interesting is that throughout the region, there were significant movement of peoples moving southward to exploit new land in the Lower Mekong delta, the Chao Phraya basin, and the Irrawaddy River delta. Other flows of fluid population reached to the hill and mountainous regions which are called today as *Zomia*, the Southeast Asian massif

¹⁴ See James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009)

stretching from Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar.¹⁵ The demographic shift was followed by expansion of trading network, building society of multiethnicity and the creation of the new form of administrative system. Regarding this framework, Victor Lieberman points out the race was much closer one as to which political system would ride the way of economic and technical change. All the great powers such as Siam, Burma and Vietnam did increase in centralization and cohesion in a new burst of energy at the end of eighteenth century.¹⁶ The centralized expansion, introduction of ideology of boundary, administrative management, full state sovereignty reaching to the hill, and other state-making infrastructures presented changing the mainland political terrain. And through these changes, contour of a new power paradigm was being shaped, especially in the cases of Siam and Đại Nam. This thesis thus brings to light the answer of how this phenomenon occurred in Vietnam and how Vietnam contributed to this political transformation in the Mekong basin via its regional involvement.

Eighteenth century Vietnam witnessed significant power shift and changing geopolitics. Territory expanded southward and power moved northward. With a thirty day-campaign in July 1802, Nguyễn Ánh (or Ong Chiang Sua, in Thai), whose power was generated in the south, completely controlled the North [*Bắc Hà*] and brought two hundred year-division to an end. For the first time through thousands year history, Vietnamese coherently marked their geographical distribution over a vast space which was roughly tripled in size in the last several centuries. By connecting different Vietnamese spaces and groups, new rulers, the Nguyễn, had a stronger regional role to play as a “small dragon”.¹⁷ Followed this historical phenomenon, there are three main basic issues need to unfold:

1. Sources of dynamism allowing the Nguyễn to be a regional power

¹⁵ Willem van Schendel, “Geographies of Knowing, Geographies of Ignorance: Southeast Asia from the Fringes,” a paper for the workshop Locating Southeast Asia: Genealogies, Concepts, Comparisons and Prospects, Amsterdam, March 29–31, 2001, James C. Scott, The Art of Not Being Governed (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009)

¹⁶ Anthony Reid, ed., The Last Stand of Asian Autonomies: Responses to Modernity in the Diverse State of Southeast Asia and Korea, 1750-1900 (London: Macmillan, 1997), p. 17

¹⁷ See Buttinger, Joseph, The Smaller Dragon: A Political History of Vietnam (New York: Praeger, 1958)

2. New geo-politics in Đại Nam associating with the Vietnamese spatial consciousness, territorial re-organization, power orientation and the creation of Vietnamese “world order”
3. And the number of ways in which the rise of Đại Nam brought political transformation to the Mekong valley.

In other words, this thesis will examine Vietnamese history through the perspective of regional integration. A view has been rarely touched by Vietnamese national scholarships those who have a strong belief that foreign relation during the first nineteenth century Vietnam was insignificant either with European or with neighbouring countries. That was the Nguyễn’s weakness and failure and because of this, a high cost, the independence of Vietnam, had to pay.* Outside Vietnam, however, certain scale of academic concerns has been paid to political integration in the Mekong region and associating the Siamese-Vietnamese relation with the difference of diplomatic worldview, religious worldview, and economic and political interests. This thesis will gradually unfold those problematic differences and suggest its own version of interpretation, but before that, a glance over previous scholarship is essentially necessary.

Generally speaking, previous scholarships concerning to the theme can be taken into three forms.

Firstly, we look at characteristic of Hanoi-based historians in the second half twentieth century who saw early nineteenth century Vietnam with no significant regional relationship. This belief was mainly employed by nationalist scholars with a strong claim that basically, the Nguyễn was in the crisis age of “the Vietnamese feudal system” [*ché độ phong kiến Việt Nam*].¹⁸ Therefore, this dynasty was politically characterized in name of a “reactionary” monarchy who blindly maintained a closed-door policy which crippled the nation’s economic development and

* The exception is Đặng Văn Chương, Quan hệ Thái Lan –Việt Nam cuối thế kỷ XVIII-nửa đầu thế kỷ XIX [Siamese-Vietnam Relationship in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century] (Hanoi: Nxb Đại học Su pham, 2010) which will be discussed following

¹⁸ Ủy Ban Khoa Học Xã Hội Việt Nam, Lịch sử Việt Nam, Tập 1 [History of Vietnam, Vol. 1], (Hanoi: Nxb Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1971), pp. 368-386

ultimately weakened Đại Nam when it had to face the full force of the French imperialism.¹⁹

The second approach was structurally favoured in employing the Chinese model which was set off by the very first generation of western scholars during the Indochina war. John Whitmore and Alexander Woodside were among those pioneers who tried to figure out a possible frontier between the Southeast Asian part and the Chinese part of Vietnamese identity. For an examination of the Nguyễn's political model, we have Woodside's outstanding 1971 book, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model: A Comparative Study of the Nguyễn and Ch'ing Civil Government in the first half of the nineteenth century*. In this book, the author shows the extent to which Chinese elements were imported into Vietnamese political ideology and practice. In other words, the Nguyễn Vietnam was seen as a product of the interaction between the Chinese world and the Southeast Asian world, a cultural and political hybridity.²⁰ Recently, Liam Kelley discusses a distinctive cultural frontier between Vietnamese and Chinese through consciousness of the Vietnamese elite and intellectuals.²¹ With the help of Woodside's and Liam's Sinicization paradigm, we can gain very intriguing top-down insight into traditional Vietnam's political, social, and cultural structure. But this model sometime prevents historians from perceiving pragmatic motivation behind the sense of Confucianism or as Choi Byung Wook suggests in case of Cochinchina, "the Wooside's influential concept has also sometime prevents historians from perceiving the serious efforts of the Hue Court to manage its recently unified territory".²²

Regarding to the early nineteenth century Vietnam's political organization, most of western scholarship employed the notion of "regionalism" as a dominant theory and described two hundred year conflict between the seventeenth and

¹⁹ Bruce Lockhart, Re-assessing the Nguyễn Dynasty, *Crossroad* 15, 1 (2001), p. 16

²⁰ See Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model: A Comparative Study of the Nguyễn and Ch'ing Civil Government in the first half of the nineteenth century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971)

²¹ See Liam C. Kelley, *Beyond the Bronze Pillars: Envoy Poetry and the Sino-Vietnamese Relationship*, (Honolulu: Hawai'i University Press, 2005)

²² Choi Byung Wook, *Southern Vietnam Under the Reign of Minh Mạng* (Ithaca, N. Y: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 10

nineteenth centuries as regional struggle for power and unification.* Meanwhile, Vietnamese scholars simply point out that the Tây Sơn significantly contributed to the reunification of the kingdom and Nguyễn Ánh was one who adventitiously benefited. By this mean, this view undoubtedly underestimate the Nguyễn's role in creating new administrative system and conducting reform between the 1820s and the 1830s and simplify full meaning of political reunification.²³ Other research, such as Pornpen Hatrakool's *Report on a Preliminary study on the social and economic history of Vietnam during the Nguyễn Period (1802-1883)*, (2007) pays more attention to the notion of centralization from the perspective of political, economic and social control. The author suggests that early nineteenth century Vietnam, the monarchical rule reached its highest centralized power at the point that going to decline and cease abruptly. As a result, it implemented severe pressure on land and taxes policy, and worsened the peasant economy and their livelihood.²⁴ The phenomenon thus led to unprecedented peasant movements throughout the kingdom and caused destruction to many socio-economic institutions. The work reflects an important interpretation of the early Nguyễn's socio-political history from the Marxist perspective and those who pays sympathy for it. The view to some extent still dominates the academic circle within Vietnam to produce explanation for the waxed and waned state organization and political management. It is true in many ways that early nineteenth century Vietnam was in a transitional phrase. And as I shall elaborate more below, there is also a clear evidence for the evolution of power relationship and political reorganization when burgeoning centralization called a new quest for re-construction of political system.

* Discussions in Li Tana, *Nguyễn Cochinchina: Southern Vietnam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Ithaca, N. Y: Cornell University Press, 1998), Li Tana, An Alternative Vietnam? The Nguyễn Kingdom in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Mar., 1998), pp. 111-121, Nola Cooke, Regionalism and the Nature of Nguyễn Rule in Seventeenth-Century Dang Trong (Cochinchina), *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Mar., 1998), pp. 122-161, Keith W. Taylor, Surface Orientations in Vietnam: Beyond Histories of Nation and Region, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (Nov., 1998), pp. 949-978, Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*, (M. A. : Cambridge University Press, 2003)

²³ For example, Nguyễn Minh Tường, *Cải cách hành chính dưới thời Minh Mạng* [Administrative Reform under the Reign of Minh Mạng] (Hanoi: Nxb Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1996)

²⁴ Pornpen Hatrakool, *Report on a Preliminary study on the social and economic history of Vietnam during the Nguyễn Period (1802-1883)*, (Bangkok: Toyota Foundation, 2007), pp. xi, 373

The third discourse of early nineteenth century Vietnam mainly focuses on its regional relation, even in some case, the image of Đại Nam was re-captured through historical narratives of either Laos or Cambodia via the notion of “tributary system” [*hệ thống triều cống*], “*thuộc quốc*” [dependent polities] or “*muang khun*” [dependent vassals]. Among those, there are David Chandler’s *Cambodia before the French* (1973), Eiland’s *Dragon and Elephant* (1989).²⁵ Nature of Vietnamese regional relationship in fact was limited in some case within the framework of top-down approach through religio-political concepts such as the clash between the Siamese *Cakkravatin* and Vietnamese *Son of Heaven*, and therefore, they may see no change in geopolitical organization and power paradigm.²⁶

This narrative may be useful to understand traditional cultural politics in the Mekong valley from state level, but in some specific case, the interpretation only can be acquired by going beyond state ritual and ceremony and looking at the practical motivation of contenders. The expansion of full state sovereignty, collecting tax and *corvee*, depopulation, and assimilation are component parts of a single and unique policy conducting by Siam and Đại Nam. In many cases, it is likely that Siamese and Vietnamese were acting according as their actual military and economic capacity and purpose rather than impulsively followed any fixed diplomatic guideline. And it is found that this way of acting could be better fit with the rhythm of consistently creating a new political and social structure rather than to be considered as “pre-

²⁵ See David Chandler, *Cambodia Before the French: Politics in a Tributary Kingdom, 1794-1848*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1973, Eiland, Michael Dent, *Dragon and Elephant: Relations between Vietnam and Siam, 1782-1847*, Ph. D. dissertation, George Washington University, 1989, Morragotwong Phumplab, *The Diplomatic Worldviews of Siam and Vietnam in the Pre-colonial Period (1780s-1850s)*, M.A. Thesis, National University of Singapore, 2010

²⁶ For further discussion, see Tambiah, S. J., The Buddhist Concept of Kingship and its Historical Manifestations: A Reply to Spiro, *Journal of Asian Studies*, 37: 4 (August, 19788), 801-09, Tambiah, S. J., *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), Sunait Chutintaranond, *Cakkravatin: The Ideology of Traditional Warfare in Siam and Burma, 1548-1605*, Ph. D. dissertation (Ithaca, N. Y: Cornell University, 1990), Sunait Chutintaranond, *On the Both Sides of the Tenasserim Range: History of Siamese Burmese Relations*, (Bangkok: Asian Studies Monographs, Chulalongkorn University, 1995), Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, Chapter 5. The Emperor, the Bureaucracy, and the World outside Vietnam, pp. 234-295, Yu Insun, Lich su quan he Viet Nam-Trung Quoc the ky XIX: The che trieu cong, thuc va hu [History of the Vietnamese-Chinese Relationship in the nineteenth century: The Tributary Institution, Real and Vain], *Tap chí nghiên cứu lịch sử* [Journal of Historical Research], No. 9-10 (2009)

modern-imperial policy”.²⁷ Recently, Puangthong Rungwasdisab’s *War and Trade* suggests that historians could actually deal mainly with economic factor as a driven force of both Siamese and Vietnamese involvement in Laos and Cambodia.²⁸ Nevertheless, in fact, very little concern regarding to political organization has been addressed, how much efforts had been made by the Siamese and Vietnamese in creating new political units in the overlapping zone and periphery and the following structural change of power or state organization.

In short, those previous narratives of the Nguyễn undoubtedly have made the significant contribution to improve our understanding the birth of the Nguyễn in particular and new united Vietnamese in general. However, the long and eventful evolution of Vietnamese society is not capture by those static phrases such as “feudal system” or “tributary network”. What is lacking, however, is that to put what occurred in Vietnam into the regional context of new political terrain which describing earlier in the mainland. Because of this neglect there is still no a coherent view of the pattern of political development in the mainland in which what happened in the western (Burma) and central mainland have been significantly drawn academic attentions in some way. Victor Lieberman in his outstanding book, *Strange Parallels*, suggests that the eastern part of the mainland is “*the least coherent territory in the world*”.²⁹ The term however may not perfectly fit the context of nineteenth century Vietnam, especially as one looks at Vietnamese spatial organization and power orientation from the regional context. It is crucial significance to demonstrate that political discourse in Vietnam was perfectly fallen in line with a larger scale of regional change. At the same period of time, the Siamese came to capture Chiang Mai, northern Malay Peninsula, claimed sovereignty over the Khorat Plateau, and annexed Laos and western Cambodia as parts of its new territory.³⁰ In the eastern side of the mainland,

²⁷ Phan Huy Lê et al., *Lịch sử chế độ phong kiến Việt Nam* [History of the Vietnamese Feudal Regime], Vol. 3, (Hanoi: Nxb Giao Duc, 1965), pp. 92-93, 95, 100, 106, David Chandler, An Anti-Vietnamese Rebellion in Early Nineteenth Century Cambodia: Pre-Colonial Imperialism and a Pre-Nationalist Response, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Mar., 1975), pp. 16-24

²⁸ Puangthong Rungwasdisab, *War and Trade: Siamese Interventions in Cambodia, 1767-1851*, Ph. D. dissertation, University of Wollongong, 1995

²⁹ See Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels* Vol. 1, (2003)

³⁰ See Vella, Walter, F., *Siam under Rama III, 1824-1851* (N. Y: Locust Valley, 1957), Theam Bun Srun, *Cambodia in the Mid-nineteenth Century: A Quest for Survival*, M. A. Thesis (Canberra: ANU, 1988), Ngaosyvathn Mayoury and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn, *Paths to Conflagration: Fifty years*

the Vietnamese for the first time have annexed the Lower Mekong delta, moved toward to the highland areas in the north and the central, and once attempted to turn Cambodia into its part of territory.³¹

The significance of this approach is that an effort goes beyond notions of “old Siam” and “new Siam”, “traditional Vietnam” and “colonial Vietnam” which mainly dealing with changes following by the coming of colonial power and ignoring internal factors of change within each society.³² The study, however offers an alternative view to changes from pre-modern to early modern politics of the mainland which is traditionally overwhelmed by western scholarship through examining the discourse of state making in early nineteenth century Vietnam and Siam and its impact over the Mekong river valley *vis-à-vis* attempt to control the region by Siam and Vietnam via the motivation of emerging market economy, control land and population, and full state sovereignty expansion.

By this mean, the thesis implies that early nineteenth century is a significant chapter has been lost in the twentieth century Vietnamese nationalist historiography. Yet, several modern historical issues cannot be clearly unfolded if historical context over this period of time is not carefully and comprehensively analyzed. In addition, through the illumination by using new approach and political history’s ideology, it is implied that there is an alternative to interpret this particular period of time and space as a significant transitional stage of making the modern mainland. The idea of time and space has become a key framework for Vietnamese historiography in last decades although many still lack academic attention to those particular dimensions. It is once suggested that nineteenth century Vietnam cannot be understood if it is not clearly remembered that the Vietnamese people had only recently expanded south, from present-day northern Vietnam. The Nguyen kings were the first Vietnamese rulers in

of *Diplomacy and Warfare in Laos, Thailand and Vietnam, 1778-1828* (Ithaca, N. Y: Cornell University Press, 1998)

³¹ Quốc sử quán Triều Nguyễn, *Đại Nam Thực Lục* [Records of Đại Nam] (Hanoi: Nxb Giao Duc, 2004), *Trần Tây Phong Thô Ký*, pp. 148-153

³² See Nidhi Eoseewong, *Pen and Sail* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2005), pp. 3-4; Nguyễn Thế Anh, *Kinh Tế xã hội Việt Nam dưới các vua triều Nguyễn* [Vietnam’s economy and politics under the Nguyễn’s Kings] (Sài Gòn: Trinh Bay, 1968), Nguyễn Thế Anh, *Việt Nam dưới thời Pháp đô hộ* [Vietnam under the French Colonization] (Sài Gòn: Lua Thieng, 1971)

history to administrate the Mekong delta as well as the Red River delta.³³ Other call for changing spatial approach to Vietnamese history by creating a new humanistically grounded alternative for thinking about place and space in the country's history.³⁴

To reconfigure “time” and “place” in changing geo-politics of the early nineteenth century Mainland, one need to address the conceptualization and consciousness of Vietnamese and Siamese of space and spatial organization. This can be done in a number of ways, but most importantly is to put their conceptualization and activity in a broader context of the Mekong basin and examine how the new idea of power had been constructed in association with agenda of state-making. By doing so, this thesis will gently challenge the traditional views proposed both by Vietnamese nationalist and foreign scholarship and provides an alternative understanding political structure of the mainland Southeast Asia in early modern history. It is believed that the change in the nineteenth century Vietnam cannot be understood if it is not clearly remembered that what happened in Vietnam was not regionally a unique phenomenon. During the same era, the Burmese also pushed from the north to the south and the Siamese from east to west. And by the start of the nineteenth century, all this movement had resulted in a radical reorganization of mainland Southeast Asia and formed a fundamental pattern of historical experience that would differentiate Vietnam from the Chinese context.³⁵ Within this framework, the more Vietnamese moving south, the more dynamic political transformation they created. As a result, “fundamental a configuration between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries resembled Burmese and Thai patterns more closely than that of China”.³⁶ The interaction between Siam and Myanmar in the pre-colonial time, however, has much more scholarly attention than that to the eastern part of the Mainland. And therefore, there is little connection has been found between Vietnamese and the rest of the mainland and body of knowledge from Vietnamese perspectives is still playing a minor role in understanding political transformation in the region.

³³ Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, p. 22-23

³⁴ Charles Wheeler, Rethinking the Sea in Vietnamese History: Littoral Society in the Integration of Thuan Quang, Seventeenth-Eighteenth Centuries, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 37(1), February 2006, pp. 152

³⁵ Tana, Li, *Nguyễn Cochinchina*, p. 15

³⁶ Victor Lieberman, Local Integration and Eurasian Analogies: Structuring Southeast Asian History, c. 1350-c. 1830, *Modern Asian studies*, 27, 3(1993), p. 539

From this angle of version, this thesis also challenges previous Vietnamese scholarship who intentionally isolating Đại Nam from the rest of the world and presents a belief that the main theme of the Nguyễn foreign policy was not consistently “closed-door”. In addition, putting the narrative of the Nguyễn into the regional context and finding out the reasons of its emergence from regional historical environment, this paper implies that previous research describing early nineteenth century Vietnam as a crisis age need to be fundamentally revised. It has come with the suggestion that the political organization of the Nguyễn and its military system was among the most advanced, effective in traditional Vietnam. The Vietnamese reorganized their new geo-political space and built new social model which included plural cultures and ethnicities. Detailed examination of those institutions shows that the Nguyễn should be seen as a new image of the mainland’s power rather than the decline. Such nationalist view basically basing upon the Marxist historiography leads to misunderstandings of political integration in the mainland by simply presenting Vietnam as a victim of Siamese aggressive policies over Laos and Cambodia.

“Apart from Cambodian issue, Siamese invasion of Hà Tiên for many times is another reason for the conflict between Nguyễn Lord and Siamese Kings.

... The peaceful diplomatic negotiation was broken down as Siamese increased their aggressive policy after the first Anglo-Burmese War (1824-1826), repelled the Vietnamese influence in Laos, and directly threatened Đại Nam’s security in the southwest. From 1834 to 1847, this was the zenith of the conflict between Siam and Đại Nam because Siamese intensively and severally made wars and conducted invaded policies eastward, and therefore, [Siamese] directly violated Vietnam.

... In the course of carrying expansionist policy eastward, Siam always found Vietnam as the largest obstacle. Therefore, Siamese policy toward Vietnam was double-dealing, outwardly friendly, peaceful, and helping each other; inwardly, waiting for opportunity to invade and remove Vietnamese influence from Laos and Cambodia, but their plots always failed.”³⁷

³⁷ Đặng Văn Chương, Quan hệ Việt Nam-Thái Lan, pp. 11, 168, 169, 170

In addition, the form of political pattern of the early nineteenth century mainland is believed to have fundamental link with one of the most important and *de facto* core of the twentieth century historiography, the notion of making nation state.

There is a famous story describing how Thailand's modern boundary was shaped. It is said that after partly capturing Burma, the British came to Siam and consulted the Siamese court of its kingdom's borders. The response showed that borders were not the Bangkok's main concern, as they issued to the British instructions to enquire the local people, who knew better than anyone else where the border was. Later, being asked for a cooperation to fix the mutual boundaries, Siam's surprising response was to offer that the British draw for themselves the borderline which they proposed.³⁸ In other words, constructions of modern state's geo-body is purely presented as the result of the adventitious factors such as the importation of colonial geographical and political categories and their practical applications such as land surveying and map-making.³⁹ The view seems to have a wide scholarly recognition through the theme of colonial and national historiographies in which the narrative of a modern nation state making in Southeast Asian was overwhelmingly dominated by western scholarship.

Recently, these views have been challenged in various angles. Ian Harris suggests rethinking of Cambodian political discourse on territory in the past by using the Buddhist notions, and Geoff Wade raises doubt on "*the relevance of the Westphalian system to Asia*".⁴⁰ Others, like Penny Edwards and Tomas Larrison argue that what the previous scholarship did, Thongchai in particular, that the transition to the modern understanding of a state as bounded territory resulted merely from the

³⁸ See Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A Geo-Body of a Nation* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1994)

³⁹ Carl A. Trocki, Chinese Revenue farms and Borders in Southeast Asia, *Modern Asian Studies* 43, 1 (2009), pp. 335-362

⁴⁰ Ian Harris, Rethinking Cambodian Political Discourse on territory: Genealogy of the Buddhist Ritual Boundary (sima), *JSAS*, 41, 2 (2010), Geoff Wade, "*ASEAN Divides*", (online), New Mandala, 23 December 2010 <http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/Wade-ASEAN-Divides.pdf>

imposition of Western concepts such as modern mapping and surveying techniques.⁴¹ The tendency, of course, is a source of inspiration for the re-configuration of Southeast Asian historiography in last decades, following a call to historians for going beyond Eurocentric, colonial, nationalist history. Therefore, rethinking of political transformation over the Mekong valley will be possibly a good model to re-define our understanding of the early modern state making at the edge of modernity.⁴²

Vietnamese historiography has virtually come along with those trends for decades in which a clear frontier between traditional and modern discourse has been rigidly presented, and the coming of French has been described as a watershed of modernity. In term of politics, the making of modern Vietnam, like other countries in Southeast Asia, is merely seen as a product of colonialism and the setting of its boundary also purely benefited from the French colonial policies. This research project is an effort to gently challenge these views by taking a look at the Vietnamese political discourse of the early nineteenth century. Dealing mostly with primary sources *vis-à-vis* employing indigenous concepts of political philosophy, it responds to the academic calls for setting a new terrain of Southeast Asian History in which the idea of modern nation state has been criticized from different methodological orientations and political ideologies. Its main focus will center on the Vietnamese conceptualization of geo-political space, and the consciousness of boundary, sovereignty and territory. Their significance has been largely neglected in writing on the making of the modern Vietnamese geo-political body. Vietnamese nationalist scholarship traditionally gives much credit to the Tây Sơn Movement and overlooks the Nguyễn's role in reunification of the kingdom.⁴³ On the other hand, the political

⁴¹ Penny Edwards, The Cambodge, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 2007), p. 177, Tomas Larrson, Intertextual Relations: The Geopolitics of Land Right in Thailand, Political Geography, 26 (2007), p. 779

⁴² For Siam, see Thongchai Winichakul's Siam Mapped, Eoseewong (1994), Nidhi Eoseewong, Pen and sail: literature and history in early Bangkok including the history of Bangkok in the chronicles of Ayutthaya (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2005), for Burma, see Thant Myint-U, The Making of Modern Burma (Cambridge University Press, 2001). For Vietnam, see Alexander B. Woodside's Vietnam and the Chinese Model (1971), Keith W. Taylor's Surface Orientation (1998), Choi Byung Wook's Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng (2004).

⁴³ See Văn Tân, Trả lời ông Lê Thành Khôi, tác giả sách "Nước Việt Nam, Lịch Sử và Văn Minh" [Response to Mr. Le Thanh Khoi, author of the Book's "Vietnam: History and Civilization"], Tap chi Nghien cuu Lich su [Journal of Historical Study], No. 12 (1960); Văn Tân, Ai đã thống nhất Việt Nam Nguyễn Huệ hay Nguyễn Ánh? [Who reunified Vietnam, Nguyễn Huệ or Nguyễn Ánh?] Tap

history of early nineteenth century Vietnam structurally looks at its political system rather than political philosophy. Alexander Woodside, for instance, described the early nineteenth century Nguyễn as a product of the clash between the Chinese model and Southeast Asian political organization. The same discourse has been also discussed elsewhere by Li Tana and Nola Cooke.⁴⁴ In the last decade, scholarly attention started focusing on the importance of regionalism in shaping the pattern of Vietnamese history. Keith Taylor (1998) is among the first scholars who suggested the rethinking of space and region in Vietnamese history in terms of “surface orientation,” although his argument is in the need of further discussion.⁴⁵

In fact, most of modern scholarly attentions have focused on individual national political history rather a coherent view point regionally. By generalizing these models of political development in Siam, Burma, and Vietnam, what may come to our understanding is a common political trend in which the expanding of central administrative system and transformation from kingdoms based on single ethnicity into those based upon multi ethnicities and cultures can be clearly seen. The previous scholarship on the Nguyễn’s political model is useful for analyzing different levels or factors in shaping Vietnamese political ideology and practice. However, what may not be covered though this notion is the pragmatic function of the administrative system. As mentioned above, the political terrain of the nineteenth century mainland was characterized by the expansion of centralization, the control of trading sources and taxes, manpower, and the extension in large scale of administrative establishment over political peripheries. The lower Mekong, Khorat Plateau, Malay Peninsula, and the Tai World of Laos, and northern Thailand stretching north to Sipsong Banna no longer enjoyed their autonomous status but to face “*the last stand of autonomy*”. The

chí Nghiên cứu Lịch sử [Journal of Historical Study], No. 51 (1963), Nguyễn Phương, Chung quanh vấn đề ai đã thống nhất Việt Nam, Nguyễn Huệ hay Nguyễn Ánh? [Regarding to the issue of who reunified Vietnam, Nguyễn Huệ or Nguyễn Ánh?], Tap chí đại học [Journal of University], so 35-36 (1965)

⁴⁴ Nola Cooke, Nineteenth-Century Vietnamese Confucianization in Historical Perspective: Evidence from the Palace Examinations (1463-1883), Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Sep., 1994), pp. 270-312, Nola Cooke, The Composition of the Nineteenth-Century Political Elite of Pre-Colonial Nguyễn Vietnam (1802-1883), Modern Asian Studies, Vol. 29, No. 4 (Oct., 1995), pp. 741-764; Li Tana, An Alternative Vietnam? The Nguyễn Kingdom in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Mar., 1998), pp. 111-121

⁴⁵ Taylor, Keith W., Surface Orientation (1998)

Siamese and Vietnamese of valley kingdoms started reaching to the hills with a larger scale politically, militarily, and economically. Vietnamese tried to include other ethnicities into their new political entity especially during the time of Minh Mạng in order to cultivate their culture, custom into “civilization” as the Viet.⁴⁶ The effort also resulted in creating a number of political units setting under direct control from Hue or Sài Gòn and in changing the contours of Vietnamese geo-body as seeing nowadays. The Siamese policies toward Lao, Mon, and Khmer showed the same spirit as they were resettled under Siamese control and became subjects of taxation and *corvée* labour system.

This thesis is not to directly deal with any competing narrative between colonial and national discourses on the shape of the modern Vietnamese boundary and territory, rather than to suggest that spatial consciousness and geopolitical reorganization were *de facto* core of the Vietnamese motivation in engaging over the Mekong valley.⁴⁷ For this purpose, it copes mainly with a number of issues, including the aftermaths of the process of “*the Southward advance*” and how this agenda contributed to change structure of history of this country. The Vietnamese, who originally located in the Red River delta, had made a significant expansion between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries by which the territory was tripled in size. Most importantly, the Southward movement [*Nam Tiến*] created different spaces of “Vietnamese speakers” as suggesting by Keith Taylor.⁴⁸ How the Vietnamese at that time conceptualized their own space and others? Then, when all those kinds of space was first united in 1802, how they described themselves in differentiating with their neighbors ethnically, culturally, politically, and territorially. Looking for responses to

⁴⁶ Quốc sử quán Triều Nguyễn, Minh Mệnh Chính Yếu [Abstract of Policies of Minh Mạng, hereafter MMCY] (Hue: Nxb Thuan Hoa, 1997), Quốc sử quán Triều Nguyễn, Khâm Định Đại Nam Hội điển Sự Lệ [Official Compendium of Institutions and Usages of Imperial Vietnam], 1851, Hanoi: Viện Hán Nôm VHv 1570, Choi Byung Wook, Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng (Ithaca, N. Y: Cornell University Press, 2004), chapter 4. Minh Mạng’s “Cultivation” (Giáo Hóa) of Southerners, pp. 101-128

⁴⁷ For Vietnamese premodern boundary has been discussed in Bradley C. Davis, States of Banditry: The Nguyễn Government, Bandit Rule, and the Culture of Power in the post-Taiping China-Vietnam Borderlands, Ph.D dissertation, University of Washington, 2008; Kathlene Baldanza, “The ambiguous border: Early modern Sino-Viet relations”, Ph.D dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2010

⁴⁸ See Steven M. Graw, “Nam Tiến and the Development of Vietnamese Regionalism,” M.A. Thesis, Cornell University, 1995

those questions will provide a reconstruction of the early nineteenth century Vietnamese political discourse from their own perspective. The new narrative will make the significant contribution to examine different concept of Vietnamese/ groups of Vietnamese speaker in the early nineteenth century and those of the previous times in organizing space, in conceptualizing ethnicity, and in orienting regional power.

In addition, this thesis shows a different picture of traditional boundary in the case of Vietnam. The practice of border, sovereignty has been long in effect through history of the Viet's political domain. Their cosmology, cartography, and body of geographies of knowledge were effectively involved in territorial organization and management. On the other hand, this thesis points out territorial consciousness of the Vietnamese is also fundamentally different from those of Siamese, Burmese or Cambodian contemporarily. The early nineteenth century Vietnamese through extensive regional involvement had transferred their ideology of administrative establishment, land cadastral and taxation into other peoples who also took part in shaping new political paradigm throughout the Mekong valley.

Objectives of the Thesis

This thesis essentially tackles three interrelated problems: 1. What is the significance of the rise of the Nguyễn Đại Nam in the regional political landscape, 2. How the emergence of Vietnamese promotes political integration in the Mekong valley? 3. How this political interaction resulted in shaping new power paradigm, most notably in Siam and Đại Nam? And by doing so, it focuses on:

1. To analyze Vietnamese historical perceptions in works on pre-colonial Vietnam, the early nineteenth century.

2. To examine to what extent the rise of the Nguyễn dynasty and the unified Vietnam in the early nineteenth century contributed to changes in mainland Southeast Asia's political structure and pattern of power.

3. To investigate the role of the Nguyễn in building political integration in the early nineteenth century Mekong river area and the impact of the unified Vietnam on

redefining the paradigm of power in the region before the formation of the French Indochina.

Major Arguments

This thesis is constructed as a series of related case studies, connected by the theme of early state making project. The phenomenon evoked dynamic political and geopolitical development along the Mekong valley in shaping modern contours of the region by the two main actors of Vietnamese and Siamese. That is the unprecedented reorganization of state in space by expanding centralization, by creating territorialization, and by establishing state infrastructure and state institution into complex terrain and marginalized area.

My first argument is that the Mekong valley is better understood as an integrated social and political space regardless of the divided physical terrain and cultural diversity. As states in the Vietnamese littoral and Chao Phraya basin kept moving into this region, a paradigm of power has been created through the interaction among the Vietnamese, Lao, Khmer, and Siamese for *longue duree* perspective of hundred years. Prior to the early nineteenth century, the Mekong geopolitically performed as a “field of power” overwhelmingly run by variously traditional power relationship, “network of loyalty”, kinship, and central-peripheral model. State power recognized the existence of the inhomogeneous political space; and at the frontier of the core politics, still having vast space in position of ambiguity and unidentification where peoples could enjoy much less governed by the center or even “self-governing”.

My second argument is that such power paradigm has been severely challenged by early nineteenth century Siamese and Vietnamese state making project in order to approach closer to modern form of state organization geopolitically. The extinguishment of traditional power relationship and replacement of directly territorial and administrative management from center gradually and fundamentally produces a new geopolitical structure throughout the Mekong region by design of state. This

organization involves most of the regional polities and peoples living in vast area of the mainland.

By using power of geography and cartography, Siam and Đại Nam大南 could recognize space practically visualize their project on map, and thus effectively design various categories of state infrastructure. It is also involved with unprecedented human movement and resettlement along state network. For several decades, the two projects both found partly successes by converting mountain, fallow, swamp, and amphibious and complex terrain with new human landscape and economic structure in incomparable scale which the region never experienced before. Hundred thousands of people were collected and removed under these managements. Infrastructure and state authority then came in producing administrative units. As a result of centralized design, new power paradigm of the Mekong basin has been shaped, place the space seeing like a “field of power” into the space of “seeing like a state”.

Research Methodology

To analyze these problems, I have chosen the *Annales* approach of applying intensive, interdisciplinary study to a well-defined geo-political space and extending that study over the longest possible span of time, given available materials. Using geo-politics as a focal point, I will unfold a series of transformations

The study relies mainly on documentary research, drawing heavily on documents from both primary and secondary sources including Vietnamese chronicles, edicts, gazetteers, and local records. It also attempts to integrate and compare available sources in Thai, Khmer, Laos, French and English. It relies primarily on archival materials both in un-published and published forms, with Vietnamese dynastic chronicles being employed with caution.

Those materials are available in Vietnam National Archives and national library in various forms and languages. These Vietnamese sources will be enriched by the collections at Singapore’s Libraries and Thai Libraries, including western published and primary sources in western languages.

Significance and Usefulness of Research

1. This study provides a better understanding of the Vietnamese politics in the early nineteenth century, both conceptualization of political philosophy and its realization.

2. This research will be a reference for further studies on political relations in the mainland Southeast Asia in the pre-colonial time.

3. Through surveying the case study of Vietnam, this research is in some ways to contribute to current scholarly approach to the political model of mainland Southeast Asia in the pre-modern period *vis-à-vis* the shape of geo-political body at the edge of modernity.

Literature Review

At the start of the nineteenth century, mainland Southeast Asia presented a new political terrain in which Burmese, Siamese and Vietnamese were key political players. However, it is a common fact that there has been a large scholarly neglect in historical narrative from the Vietnamese perspective in comparison with those in Siam and Burmese. As a result, Vietnam and political integration in the eastern part of the mainland lack a coherent view which can illuminate the pattern of Vietnamese history and its regional interaction. Regarding to the early nineteenth century Vietnamese history, previous scholarship, both Vietnam nationalist and foreign, focused on several “agendas” which vary in competing narrative and interpretation.

Narratives on early nineteenth century Vietnam

Early nineteenth century Vietnam is *de facto* focal point of the controversy between nationalist historiography and Western scholarship for decades. Vietnamese traditional historical narrative presented nothing rather than a lost opportunity of modernization and claims for Nguyễn’s responsibility. Marxist scholars, such as Phan Huy Lê, Trương Hữu Quýnh, and Phan Đại Doãn viewed the early nineteenth century

as a decline of thousand year-Vietnamese feudal system.⁴⁹ Following the Marxist theory of history, Vietnamese society was described in severe political, social, and economic crisis in which, rulers, the Nguyễn had completely failed to find a way for social evolution.⁵⁰ The Conventional Marxist Historiography overwhelmingly shows negative face of the Nguyễn, the dynasty of ineffective oppressive and reactionary policies. The Nguyễn victory over the Tây Sơn in 1802 was described as “the victory of the most reactionary and feudal clique in the Vietnamese civil war”.⁵¹ Of the Nguyễn’s political discourse, the standard of pre-đổi mới historiography on the Nguyễn shows that “the Nguyễn restore a reactionary feudal regime”, “the extremely absolutely monarchy”, “strengthening the apparatus of repression”, “the rotten and corrupt mandarinat”, “a system of heavy oppression and exploitation”, “backward and reactionary economic policies”, “agriculture in decline”, and “blind foreign policy”.⁵²

Other scholars such as Nguyễn Phan Quang pays attention to social and ethnic conflict and suggest that the phenomenon was result of the political and economic crisis.⁵³ “Under the Nguyễn, most of the peasant class was seriously reduced to poverty; the potential of the kingdom was destroyed.” And the economic and political conditions are suggested as main reasons of peasant and ethnic minorities’ movements against the central government in Hue.⁵⁴ In all, under the theme of

⁴⁹ Trương Hữu Quýnh, et al., Đại Cương Lịch sử Việt Nam [A Brief History of Vietnam], (Hanoi: Nxb Giáo Dục, 2006), Nguyễn Quang Ngọc et al., Tiến Trình Lịch sử Việt Nam [The Process of Vietnamese History], (Hanoi: Nxb Đại Học Quốc Gia, 2006)

⁵⁰ Đại Nam Thực Lục, Vol.1, (Hanoi:, 1962), Lời giới thiệu [Introduction], pp. 6-7

⁵¹ Trần Văn Giàu, Sự Phát triển của tư tưởng ở Việt Nam từ thế kỷ XIX đến cách Mạng tháng Tám [The Development of Vietnamese thought from the nineteenth century to the August Revolution], Vol. 1, (Hanoi: Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1973), p. 10

⁵² Bruce Lockhart, Re-assessing the Nguyễn Dynasty, p. 16, see Ủy ban khoa học xã hội Việt Nam, Lịch sử Việt Nam [History of Vietnam], Vol. 1 (Hanoi: Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1971)

⁵³ Nguyễn Phan Quang, Cuộc khởi binh của Lê Văn Khôi ở Gia Định [Le Van Khôi’s raising an army (1833-1835)] (Hochiminh City: Nxb Thanh pho Ho Chi Minh, 1991), Nguyễn Phan Quang, Phong Trao Nong Dan Viet Nam nua dau the ky XIX [Vietnamese Peasant Movements in the First half of the nineteenth Century] (Hanoi: Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1986), Nguyễn Phan Quang, Viet Nam The Ky XIX [Vietnam in the nineteenth century (1802-1884)], (Hochiminh City: Nxb Thanh Phố Ho Chí Minh, 2002)

⁵⁴ Nguyễn Phan Quang, Vai Suy Nghi ve tinh hình xã hội và phong trào nông dân ở Việt Nam nua đầu thế kỷ XIX [Some thoughts of the state of society and peasant movements in Vietnam in the early nineteenth century], in Ky Yeu Hoi thao khoa hoc, Chua Nguyễn và Vương triều Nguyễn trong lịch sử Việt Nam từ thế kỷ XVI đến thế kỷ XIX [Proceedings of the Conference on the Nguyễn Lords

nationalist historiography, nineteenth century Vietnam is narrated as a unique and regretful chance for modernization which being lost because of the rulers' reaction and failure to begin making the "progressive" transition from a crisis "feudal" economy to one where capitalism could be emerged.⁵⁵

Foreign scholarship views the early nineteenth century Nguyễn from various angles and diverse approaches in which the discourse of history is interpreted in different versions. Most of them go beyond the notion of "feudal", "crisis", and "class struggle" which are purely believed to be products of the Marxist historiography, and find themselves in the ideas of the "political model", "regionalism theory", "Vietnamization".

The first generation of western scholars, for instance, tends to look at traditional Vietnam as a political model in between China and Southeast Asia. Whitmore and Woodside examine structure of this model in two distinct and typical periods, Lê Thánh Tông of the second half of the fifteenth century and Minh Mạng of the first half of the nineteenth century.⁵⁶ Woodside came across the Chinese political model and analyzes the state structure of the Nguyễn, "concerning with the problem of Chinese cultural influences and their limitations in the politics, literature, education, and society".⁵⁷ In this respect, even the most prominent Nguyễn's king, Minh Mạng, was found as a small model of Lê Thánh Tông, the Lê's great king who built up the glory of Đại Việt as a Confucian kingdom, although Ming Mang himself

and the Nguyễn Dynasty in Vietnamese history from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth centuries], (Hanoi: Nxb The Gioi, 2008), pp. 365-66

⁵⁵ Văn Tân, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu, một nhà trí thức yêu nước nông nản, một nhà thơ lỗi lạc của dân tộc Việt Nam [Nguyễn Đình Chiểu, An ardently patriotic intellectual and outstanding poet of the Vietnamese nation], *Nghien Cuu Lich su* [Journal of Historical Research], 143:2 (1972). Van Tan, Nguyễn Công Trứ và những việc ông làm hồi thế kỷ XIX [Nguyễn Công Tru and his works in the nineteenth century], *Nghien cuu Lich su* [Journal of Historical Research], 152: 5-14 (1974), Phan Huy Le et al., *Lịch sử chế độ phong kiến Việt Nam* [History of the Vietnamese Feudal Regime], Vol. 3, (Hanoi: Nxb Giao Duc, 1965), Trương Hữu Quỳnh and Đỗ Bang, eds., *Tình hình ruộng đất và kinh tế nông nghiệp dưới triều Nguyễn* [The State of Agricultural land and peasant life under the Nguyễn Dynasty] (Hue: Thuan Hoa, 1997)

⁵⁶ See John K. Whitmore, *The Development of the Le Government in Fifteenth Century Vietnam*, Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1968; Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model* (1971)

⁵⁷ Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, p. 1

was not favor by the new circumstance and was stuck inside the world of Neo-Confucianism in dealing with the west.⁵⁸

By putting the Nguyễn political organization on the Confucian platform, Woodside, Nola Cooke, and Li Tana share the same argument, more or less, that there is a continuity of Confucian tradition in Vietnamese society between the fifteenth and early nineteenth century in which Confucian notions were significantly refracted throughout the Vietnamese perspective. Correspondingly, the model could be seen as a product of the clash between Vietnamese political idea and Chinese political philosophy. In comparing the civil structures of China and Vietnam, on the basis of Chinese and Vietnamese historical records, government statutes, popular and classical literature, they bring into focus the similarities and differences of the two societies as well as the influence of the former upon the latter. The comparison becomes a classical study in the modification of the Chinese cultural pattern in a Southeast Asian environment. Experience with comparable studies of Korea and Japan leads to the expected conclusion that Vietnam never succeeded in completely conquering the difficulties of domesticating the Chinese institutional model and furthermore that this model never completely stifled Vietnamese ingenuity. Among the features examined are the tensions between the Vietnamese environment and the imported Chinese institutions, the dualism of the Vietnamese monarchy, certain recurring divergences in social structure and social ideology, the impact of narrowly channeled Confucian acculturation upon the political options of disenchanted intellectuals, and a wide range of general and specific institutional comparisons.

In addition, a great scholarly concern also draws to examine “Vietnamese Confucianism”, the framework is believed to be a key for any understanding early nineteenth century Vietnam.* Confucian approach however will limit historians from perceiving the economic and social change in the grassroots of society. And because

⁵⁸ Choi Byung Wook, *Vung Dat Nam Bo Duoi trieu Minh Mang* [Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mang], (Hanoi: Tuvanbooks and Nxb The Gioi, 2011), p. 17

* See more in Liam C. Kelley, “*Confucianism*” in Vietnam, pp. 314-370

of this gap, new “agenda” was presented, the discourse of “regionalism” in Vietnamese history.

“Regionalism theory” suggests that there are different models or ways to become modern Vietnamese and the sixteenth century made a milestone to create those historical “episodes”. Cochinchina has been acknowledged as one among those.⁵⁹ Taylor however suggests of a more diverse political landscape among Vietnamese speakers by pointing out different ways of “acting Vietnamese” in different times and places. Denying the existence of “Nam Tiến” as a modern Vietnamese historiographical invention, he believes premodern Vietnam can be strategically read as many specific episodes at different times and places that have no apparent relation to one another and no logic of connection.⁶⁰ The idea promotes new approach to the Nguyễn as a first ruler who controlled a united space of the Vietnamese. “Nguyễn Ánh was the first person to organize Nam Bo as a region capable of participating successfully in war and politics among Vietnamese speakers”.⁶¹ Therefore, Taylor’s paradigm presents that by the early nineteenth century, establishment of new dynasty is the first step to reorganize Vietnamese political space and to incorporate diverse peoples, cultures into more united domain. At the same time, Nola Cooke and Victor Lieberman see regionalism as driven force of Vietnamese political and territorial evolution. Both also point out the Nguyễn’s challenge to overcome regional development and established state control over new vast territory. Most recently, Choi Byung Wook looks at southern Vietnam as a case study to analyze the “central policy and local response” during the reign of Minh Mạng. He points out the very process of centralization and the Vietnamese assimilation are the main reasons of peasant and ethnic movements to against the court in Hue.⁶² And the Nguyễn’s effort to set up territory and conduct “Vietnamization” had gone into Cambodia between the 1820s and the 1830s.⁶³

⁵⁹ See Li Tana, “An Alternative Vietnam” (1998)

⁶⁰ Keith Taylor, “Surface Orientation”, p. 951

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 967

⁶² Choi Byung Wook, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng*, pp. 194-95

⁶³ David Chandler, *A History of Cambodia* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2008), pp. 149-161; Trần Tây Phong Thổ Ký (2007)

Đại Nam: a Regional Power and Regional Integration

To view Đại Nam as a regional power, scholarship has basically employed the context of “*tributary system*”. Woodside suggests that “essentially, Sino-Vietnamese court could not adopt and use Chinese institution without adopting and using the Chinese world view” and sought the respect of foreigners by maintaining publicly that his own unchallengeable political virtue.⁶⁴ Nguyễn kings, from Gia Long to Tự Đức, had tried to build themselves a Chinese-style tributary system based on “Đại Nam Imperial World Order”.⁶⁵ The view has popular influence among scholarship on premodern Vietnam who tries to characterize the kingdom as part of “Chinese world”, and by doing so, drawing a contradiction with the rest of Theravada Mainland.⁶⁶

However the approach has its own problem. Generally speaking, it could not give a comprehensive explanation of economic and territorial integration by merely using such kind of religio-political framework.⁶⁷ This narrative is traditionally found in the Nguyễn’s foreign policy which is mostly seen in the theme of “world view” or security reason rather than economic or territorial factor. It is obviously that using the concept of “tributary” only may not bring to light an adequate answer to the question of economic control and territorial establishment in early nineteenth century Vietnam.

Those previous scholarships offer us a fundamental starting point for any further discussion of the rise of the Nguyễn and the change in the paradigm of power in the early nineteenth century mainland Southeast Asia. The two discourses were examined before as distinct historical “agendas”. In this thesis, those will be brought on the same political context of the mainland, the expansion of centralization and domination in large scale of early modern state making in which, a series of significant political events taking place in Vietnam and the mainland will be illuminated from a new angle of vision.

⁶⁴ Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, p. 234

⁶⁵ Yu Insun, *Lịch sử quan hệ Việt Nam – Trung Quốc*, p. 12, note 66

⁶⁶ David Chandler, *Cambodia before the French*, pp. 4-5; Eiland, Michael Dent, *Elephant and Dragon*, p. 1

⁶⁷ Puangthong Rungswasdisab, *War and Trade*, p. 4

The new discourse on early nineteenth century Vietnam shows how the second and the third generations of either western scholarship or west-based scholars approach the subject from a very different perspective with that of the first one. Whitmore, Woodside, O' Harrow, Taylor, Yu Insun, Momoki Shiro have and firmly maintained their stand on nationalism in constructing early modern Vietnamese historiography which mainly relied on diverse materials of chronicles and records between the thirteenth and the nineteenth centuries with the belief that ideology and practice of Vietnamese "nation", even creation of geo-body have been gradually shaped for long.⁶⁸

Taylor recently renounced the "united national theme" and strongly promoted for new belief on "regionalism theory" with the idea that there is no connection between the traditional Vietnamese political entities and the modern one. Both Taylor and Li Tana have pointed out, Vietnamese historiography, either in North America or in Vietnam, have overemphasized the analysis of national and regional groups.⁶⁹ And therefore, many others introduce how precolonial Vietnamese were holding different version of histories rather than a single one, including cultural politics. Choi Byung Wook, Nola Cooke, Wynn Wilcox, Yumio Shakurai, Victor Lieberman all propose a new model for Vietnamese history of the nineteenth century which they are strongly convinced that the understanding the pattern of the Southern Vietnam is indispensable key in understanding the whole country. In other words, history of Vietnam was being led from the southern model which successfully brought Nguyễn family to the throne by convincingly defeating model of the north. Wynn Wilcox, for instance, suggests the strait of "transnationalism and multiethnicity" in the early Nguyễn Ánh reign. It is resulted from the uniqueness phenomenon of extreme desperation and thus the

⁶⁸ Stephen O' Harrow, Nguyễn Trãi's "Bình Ngô Đại Cáo" of 1428: The Development of a Vietnamese National Identity, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Mar., 1979), pp. 159-174, Momoki Shiro, "Nation and Geo-Body in Early Modern Vietnam: A Preliminary Study through Sources of Geomancy" in Sun Laichen and Geoff Wade, eds., *Southeast Asia in the Fifteenth Century: The China Factor* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2010), pp. 126-153

⁶⁹ See Taylor, "Surface Orientations in Vietnam" (1998); Li Tana, Nguyễn Cochinchina, esp. pp. 99-116

Nguyễn ruler was willing to accept assistance from any person with ability, regardless of one background or nationality.⁷⁰

The concern may be paid further to another point, the role this diversity played to introduce modernity into Vietnamese history which colonial historiography used to take advantage by portraying those French individuals as pioneers of the civilized mission in Indochina. Those French men were considered as indispensable figures in winning the Tây Sơn wars, and therefore, they are catalysts in making the contours of modern Vietnam by presenting military technology and European cartography.⁷¹ Political transformation in the early nineteenth century Đại Nam is not that simple. One needs to search for root of social and political change by looking at the larger scale of transformation in Vietnam both from the core state and periphery.

In fact, some of previous research has been looking at the “move” and “shift” of political space both in each country of the mainland and throughout the region as a whole. Some of the possible dominant features of cultural politics have been pointed out, like the emphasis on territoriality, standardization political unity, and strengthening centralized control. Ethnic minority and national integration interestingly started becoming the significant agenda in Siam and Đại Nam and Bangkok and Hue were in the need of carrying policy in dealing with those new territory, new diversity, and new resistance in an early form of “nation state” but existing as space of empire.⁷² All modern states in the mainland comprise quite considerable number of ethnics, for instance, fifty-four in Vietnam, one hundred and thirty-five in Myanmar, c. forty in Thailand. In fact, however, little work in dept has been done to reveal how those multiple ethnicities have been historically incorporated in a single flag and share the same position in map of nations. The process of course, can be traced back beyond the colonial discourse, and early nineteenth century is among such important periods which are neglected. As Ben Anderson comments, this

⁷⁰ Wynn Wilcox, “Transnationalism and Multiethnicity”, p. 195

⁷¹ For the transformation of European military technology and cartography, see K. Whitmore, “Cartography in Vietnam”, in The History of Cartography, Vol. 2, bk. 2, eds. J. B. Harley and David Woodward (Chicago University Press, 1996); Frédéric Mantiene, “The Transfer of Western Military technology to Vietnam”, Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003

⁷² Benedict Anderson, “Studies of the Thai State”, p. 27; Clive J. Christie, A Modern History of Southeast Asia (I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd: New York, 2000), pp. 2-5

neglect reflects an axiomatic view of Thailand as “Tai-land”, Vietnam as “Viet-land”, and Burma as “Burmans-land”, since all those classic kingdoms, back to eighteenth century, were wet-rice agricultural core area dominated by a single ethnic group.⁷³ How this simple social and political had been changed when those valley kingdoms moved to the hills and complex terrain where diversity and flexible adaptation were keys for success. Valley state had to transform itself although in this process of interaction, people always simply looked for changes at the highland society rather than at centralized state. The interaction had equal motivation of change for both. Complex inter-ethnic mixes was an essential and long-lasting product of this phenomenon which in many case, one can see how social structure was fundamentally changed. It is important to realize that both founder of the Thonburi and Chakri dynasties were mix-Chinese ethnicity. It is said that king Mongkut’s word for it that the bride of his great-grandfather was “a beautiful daughter of one of the richest Chinese families in Ayutthaya”, in other words, that Rama I was half Chinese.⁷⁴ Why a small, almost unknown, and half-Chinese official from remote Tak province could successfully gain the Siamese support and expelled the Burmese within six months? Part of the answer probably could be found in new social structure in which what one is doing is much more important than who one is and where one comes from.

Not only social organization but also political structure of rising central state also needed to be reconfigured. In most of pre-modern kingdoms, the state was defined by its center, not by its boundaries, not by its populations, but by its rulers. For this reason, it was relatively easy for Mon, Lao, Persians, Chinese, or Malay to be loyal to the monarch. They were, after all, in common his subjects. Their ethnic identity in no way determined the degree of the access to him.⁷⁵ And the loyalty is believed to have more roles to play in this circumstance. This old structure undoubtedly based on the network of loyalty but saw diversity as potential threat. Kings of Ayutthaya needed to strictly separate different ethnic groups into different villages to prevent them from any rebellion. Unfortunately, the fear of those kings had

⁷³ Benedict Anderson, “Studies of the Thai State”, p. 28

⁷⁴ Skinner, Chinese Society, pp. 19-26

⁷⁵ Benedict Anderson, “Studies of the Thai State”, paper submitted to the conference on The State of Thai Studies, Chicago, March 30, 1978, p. 31

become truth, not for a single time, and the list of Ayutthaya's kings becoming victims also was not single.⁷⁶ The Chakri Kings, however saw diversity means more manpower, more military forces, and more taxation. Thus, all those ethnic diversity were put surrounding Bangkok intermingle without any separation, but for economic and military purpose, even the Vietnamese, those came from Siamese enemy country.⁷⁷

Traditionally, some measures of control were exercised over the vassal states and over the distant peripheries with hereditary governorship, however through a system of marriage alliances. It was the policies of the Thai kings to acquire the daughters of heads of dependences to fill the royal harem. These women formed a permanent bond between the Bangkok and government and the leaders of vassal state and provinces.”⁷⁸ The Vietnamese kings at the same time, enjoyed the network of vassal state which they strongly believed to include Britain and France. However, early nineteenth century saw in both Đại Nam and Siam the re-constructing of geopolitics economically, politically, and demographically. Rise of new centers those owning better agricultural condition, easier access for international trade, and demographic growth. Sài Gòn and Bangkok are model of the emerging center of the early nineteenth century, amid the loss of traditional powers like Ayutthaya and Thăng Long/ Hà Nội. In addition, part of the reason for the success of Bangkok or Sài Gòn was the ability to connect and control periphery and semi-periphery which now became part of core-state. Periphery became source of central state's economic and

⁷⁶ Van Vliet, Jeremias, The Short history of the kings of Siam, trans., Leonard Andaya; from a transcription by Miriam J. Verkuijl-van den Berg; edited by David K. Wyatt (Bangkok : Siam Society, 1975); Chris Baker, et al., Van Vliet's Siam (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2005), Dirk Van der Cruysse, Siam and the West 1500-1700, trans., Michael Smithies (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2002), Dhiravat na Pombejra, “A Political History of Siam under the Prasatthong Dynasty, 1629–1688” (Ph.D. thesis, London, 1984)

⁷⁷ Edward Van Roy, “Twixt Land and Sea: Bangkok's Plural Society on the Verge of Modernity”, MS

⁷⁸ Walter F. Vella, The Impact of the West on Government in Thailand (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1955), p. 327

political dynamism.⁷⁹ The Tây Sơn movement would be an intriguing example of rising periphery in this category.

This thesis also comes across the changing spatial re-organization both in valley state and in areas beyond rivers and mountains. When state conquered the hills, it brought along with new cultural politics and different administrative management. The Siamese in fact had transferred those ideas to the Khorat Plateau where Lao peoples were majority. In a larger scale, the Nguyễn tried to apply Vietnamese standard of politics, culture, and language to all ethnicities within its domain, from the Tay, Nung, and Tai in the northern mountains to the south of Khmer and even in Cambodia between 1835 and 1840.⁸⁰ Many documents show various form of resistance of the highlander against the conquest of the valley, but not all the political ideology of the central state had been rejected. *Muang*s in Khorat and Laos had adapted a certain form of central state in organizing their political space and seeking a more independent position. Chau Anu for instance, who was trained in Bangkok but inspired by the model of Vietnamese central state, applied it to reunify Lao *muangs* and against Bangkok influence. For those people like Chau Anu, of course, Laos is at the center of political space, not the periphery. And the expansion of Siamese and Vietnamese idea of central state to a certain extent, did impact on their political transformation. Two little-studied Lao chronicles, *Phonsawadan Phu Khiao* and the *Phongsawadan Xamneua* during the 1840s, suggest that those people in Vientiane probably were influenced by the Vietnamese cadastral and census practices to manage their own political system.⁸¹

Structure of the Thesis

In Chapter II, “*Paradigm of early state in the Mekong valley and the regional engagement of Đại Nam*”, I will propose a pattern of political changes in the mainland

⁷⁹ Eric Wilson, *The Tay-Son Uprising (1771-1802): Periphery/Semi-Periphery/Core Dynamics in Early Modern Viet Nam*, paper presented at the Symposium: Southeast Asia and World History, Siem Reap, Cambodia, 2-4 January 2012

⁸⁰ David Chandler, *A History of Cambodia* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Book: 2008), pp. 149-161

⁸¹ Michael Vickery, “Two Historical Records of the Kingdom of Vientiane”, in Christopher E. Goscha and Soren Ivarsson, eds., *Contesting Visions of the Lao Past: Lao Historiography at the Crossroads* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2003), pp. 3-34

Southeast Asia in a *longue duree* perspective and examine different element of Vietnamese regional involvement over the time. The foundation of this structure essentially compromised various suggested models among scholarship on Southeast Asia in the last century whose analyses of political transformation in the region experience variously angles of version and perspectives both on the “inside” and on the “outside”, most notably, the competing narrative between “localization” and “Indianziation”, “Sinicization”, and Euro-centric view.

Recognizing the space as a paradigm, it seeks to produce new category of spatial element based on not only physical distinction but also following human fluidity and power relationship among state and non-state population. By this mean, it explores the early form of power paradigm in the Mekong region and its role in shaping the area as an integrated social and political space regardless to the physical division and cultural distinction between Siamese, Lao, and Cambodian Theravada world and Vietnamese Sino-frontier. And putting all such kinds of sociopolitical interaction in a space, process of geography can precisely assist to generate new scale of human landscape relating to those relationships, in which I suggest template of power relationship along the Mekong prior to the eighteenth century as an inhomogeneous field of power.

In this field, Vietnamese has a critical and increasing role to play. Given the Vietnamese unification as a source of power dynamics along the Mekong, this chapter also makes the argument that the rise of Đại Nam 大南 in the early nineteenth century marked a watershed of power orientation of early modern Vietnam. For thousand years of political relation and sharing partly cultural similarity, foreign affairs in the Vietnamese perspective were very much dependent on the north-south axis. Not only playing as economic power, source of “civilization” and political recognition, the continuous threat from possibility of being invaded by Chinese dynasties placed a special attention and vigilance over the Vietnamese power relationship. However, the northern frontier was surprisingly pretty quiet over the period of time and there was also no longer possible for an alert on the Chinese invasion. Having comprehensive and updated information about the north through different channels, Huế likely

became more confident to deal with the Qing than other previous dynasties.⁸² Therefore, more focus was shifting to the south and the western frontier. The idea that Vietnamese moving from the “Chinese World” to “Southeast Asian World” is not about the changing of political institution or ideology, but the turning of concern and attention from the northern periphery to the southern space. What comes across clearly from the sources is that mainland’s neighbours played indispensable role in Hue’s foreign policy which the dynasty produced large amount of knowledge, spent commitment, and used large scale military movement. By this mean, the Nguyễn set a new level of regional engagement.

Chapter III, “*Early nineteenth century Vietnam: A politics of space*” will examine detailed transformation of the Vietnamese power paradigm between the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The case of Vietnam will help to build up our model of political transformation in the mainland with its full defining function and dominated feature. I suggest that early nineteenth century Vietnamese saw the extensive reconstruction of geopolitical space through territorialization and standardized administration run by centralized state. To do so, the centralized state uses power of geography and cartography to recognize, conquer, and rebuild space as part of its state-making project. Such process of spatial reconstruction not only involves with connecting different spaces of Vietnamese speakers but also territorializing periphery and semi-periphery into state domain

In chapter IV, “The Mekong valley: a space of state-making”, the argument then will be extended over the Mekong valley, concerning to what I suggest as Siamese and Vietnamese early modern state-making project. This chapter first devotes to several political, economic, social, and cultural institutions that facilitate the rise of centralized state. By considering the emergence of the Nguyễn as a start-off point, I draw connected lines between Siam and Đại Nam in expanding over the Mekong basin and argue that the region was increasingly in the quest of ‘centralization’ both encouraging by internal development and competition and external threat. Therefore, Vietnamese and Siamese responses in the Mekong valley

⁸² See Yu Insun, “Lịch sử quan hệ Việt Nam-Trung Quốc (2009)

all come from the same spirit of early nation state making and were greatly assisted by increasing body of geographies of knowledge and development of cartography.

Part of this discussion will try to reveal to some extent stories beyond what has been called “the shadow of the throne”⁸³ and approach to smaller political polities along the Mekong those not only played as victims by also adapters. It will show how full state sovereignty moved to the hill and how the hill responded, not only escaping as it has been generally viewed. As a result of the economic, political and social change, this chapter also acknowledges political transformation as a regional phenomenon, precisely in the Mekong basin. My argument is that that the space was in transforming, with different scale, into state-making. The process places the Mekong valley’s field of power into the space of centralization, of territorialization and standard political management. In addition, I also discuss the creation of multiethnic society, reorganization of proto-national space and reconstruction of geopolitics throughout the Mekong valley with the belief that contour of early modern political structure was being shaped.

⁸³ F. N. Trager and W. J. Koenig, Burmese Sit-tans 1764-1826: Records of Rural Life and Administration, Association for Asian Studies Monographs, No. 36) (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1979)

CHAPTER II

PARADIGM OF EARLY STATE IN THE MEKONG VALLEY AND THE REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT OF ĐÀI NAM

This chapter explores the early form of power paradigm in the Mekong region and its role in shaping the area as an integrated social and political space regardless to the physical division and cultural distinction between Siamese, Lao, and Cambodian Theravada world and Vietnamese Sino-frontier. Recognizing the space as a paradigm, it seeks to produce new category of spatial element based on not only physical distinction but also following human fluidity and power relationship among state and non-state population. As Lefbvre suggests, “social space is a social product” in which social scientist may seek for building concept of production and the act of producing space. And because “space is never empty, it always embodies a meaning”,¹ history of the region can be read differently if one goes beyond pre-acknowledge of modern national boundary, in time when the idea of Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam has not appeared yet and therefore pattern of inter-regional relationship was more fluid and flexible in place.

The central Mekong, in both sides, were prominently dominated by the Laos prior to the nineteenth century and demographic influx along the lower Mekong up to the Tonle Sap of Khmer, Vietnamese, Chinese, Cham and others was highly free.² Other examples of political fluidity can be seen among the Tai principalities and many groups at the frontier of state whose power was negotiated and population was in “multiplicity and interpenetration ... continual yet uneven overlappings, intersections, and collusions”.³

Putting all such kinds of sociopolitical interaction in a space, process of geography can precisely assist to generate new scale of human landscape relating to

¹ Lefbvre, Henri, The production of space, translated by Donald Nicholson Smith (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1991), p. 154

² Trần Tây Phong Thổ Ký, p. 150

³ Lisa Lowe, Critical Terrains (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 5

those relationships. “Social relations exist to the extent they possess spatial expression: they project themselves into space, becoming inscribed there, and in the process producing that space itself.”⁴In this context, there has been possibly an alternative approach to historicize geographical studies of the Mekong area and offering a critical spatial analysis for the region as a whole in term of human interaction. Victor Lieberman recently presents a version of the mainland integration for roughly one thousand years in the premodern history in term of territorial consolidation, administrative centralization, and cultural integration.⁵At the center of his paradigm are the main kingdoms playing as centralized hub to expand state-institution in space and creating power relation with peoples along the Mekong.

Power network in the Mekong valley can be narrated differently based on various political patterns. The way state expressing its influence and managing land [territory] and people [population] has been long in academic controversy. Competing narrative of power organization in Southeast Asia reflects the fact that state is exclusive and uneasy to define, particularly using western concept of politics.⁶ The clash between external perspective and internal one [localization] in describing state structure produces various power paradigms. It is important to briefly go through those conceptualizations for a better understanding how states, prior to the early nineteenth century, along the Mekong practice authority, and organize politics in space.

Apart from the state-zone, recently James C. Scott reminds nicely and dramatically that along the Mekong region, apart from agrarian state, there also are large number of population and groups living at the world of periphery, the area of penumbra of less governed or virtually autonomous people.⁷ A clear distinction between those “state” and “non-state”, between those “state-governed” and “self-

⁴ Sachchidanand Sahai, *The Mekong River: Space and Social Theory*, p. 7

⁵ Lieberman, *Strangle Parallels*, vol. 2, pp. 11-2

⁶ See David Marr and A.C. Milner, eds., *Southeast Asia in the 9th to the 14th centuries*, (Singapore: ISEAS; Canberra: Research School of Pacific Studies, 1986); Stuart-Fox, Martin, “Political patterns in Colin Mackerras, ed., *Southeast Asia*”, in *Eastern Asia: An Introduction History*, (Longman, 2000); Vickery Michael, *Society, economics, and Politics in Pre-Angkor Cambodia, the Seventh-eighth centuries* (Tokyo: Tokyo Bunko, Center for East Asian Cultural Studies for UNESCO, 1998), pp. 322-23

⁷ James C. Scott, *The Art of Not being Governed*, pp. 3-4

governing” peoples in many case seems exaggerated, but at least it relocates and diversify views toward the suggestive historical relationship between different layers of physical terrains. Using paradigm of power as a departure point of approach, this chapter aims to seek a template of power interaction in the Mekong basin by looking at the colliding of different spatial layers, of various political organizations, and of religious and cultural diversity. Continuously, central state kept moving up to the mountain and hill, into complex terrain, and into blank space of power. However, I suggest that power paradigm in the Mekong basin before the early nineteenth century is defined by space of inhomogeneity. Within political domain of state power, there has been existence of different layers of political organization and recognition. The differentiation of center, periphery, semi-periphery, and overlapping zone implies that “state” was performing as a “field of power”, and hegemony in controlling frontier rather than a united centralized political entity. In spite of the process of state expansion, the maintenance of traditional power relationship along the Mekong is the defining trait of regional politics and geopolitical structure. The situation however was fundamentally facing severe challenges as Siamese and Vietnamese intensified their project of centralization and established new linkage of central-peripheral version by territorialization of space.

Interestingly enough, the rise of Siam and Đại Nam is unprecedentedly parallel, and those are both responsible for the reconstruction of the Mekong’s human landscape. Despite of the fact that national historiography puts claim on each other for the spark of several decade-confrontation, the rise of Vietnam as a regional geographical entity stretching thousand miles along the eastern littoral. The collecting space of the early nineteenth century expands the Vietnamese view of geopolitics. Prior to the late eighteenth century, the eastern mainland is considered as “field of power” of different families and “feudal” lords whose authority was fragmented and peripheral. At times, there were military campaigns of the Lê dynasty to Laos, Nan, and Chiang Mai in the late 15th century, the moving of the Lê-Trịnh’s control over the Tai area in northwestern mountain, more consistently, the Nguyễn Cochinchina’s

involvement in Cambodia since the 1620s, and the Tây Sơn campaign in Laos.⁸ However those implications are often influential in small scale and short term appearance of the Viet into the Mekong region. New Vietnamese geopolitics of the Nguyễn fosters the move further by facilitating spatial connection along the Mekong valley with others power centers of Laos, Cambodia, and Siam. The production of a single political power in the eastern mainland subsequently leads the central and lower Mekong to be the target of a united ambition. As in the middle mainland, Siamese centralization also extensively expanded along the north-south axis, Laos and Cambodia were precisely placed into a peripheral corridor in between. Such power paradigm brings autonomous groups of most remote parts along the Mekong into dynamic challenge. The raise of Vietnam contributes to the increasing competition not only limits within Cambodia like during the Nguyễn Cochinchina, but a regional colliding along its western frontier from the Tai world of Laos to the Lower Mekong, and islands in the Gulf of Thailand. It is an unparalleled phenomenon occurring in the mainland as geopolitical shape of the whole Mekong space is oriented by only two main political players.

Given the Vietnamese unification as a source of power dynamics along the Mekong, this chapter also makes the argument that the rise of Đại Nam 大南 in the early nineteenth century marked a watershed of power orientation of early modern Vietnam. For thousand years of political relation and sharing partly cultural similarity, foreign affairs in the Vietnamese perspective were very much dependent on the north-south axis. Not only playing as economic power, source of “civilization” and political recognition, the continuous threat from possibility of being invaded by Chinese dynasties placed a special attention and vigilance over the Vietnamese power relationship. However, the northern frontier was surprisingly pretty quiet over the period of time and there was also no longer possible for an alert on the Chinese invasion. Having comprehensive and updated information about the north through different channels, Huế likely became more confident to deal with the Qing than other

⁸ See John Whitmore, *Two campaigns* (2001), idem, “*Tai/Vietnamese interaction*” (2000), Hoang Anh Tuan, “*Rice politics*” (2012), Michael Vickery, ““1620” , a cautionary tale”, in Michael Arthur Aung-Thwin and Kenneth R, Hall, eds., *New Perspectives on the History and Historiography of Southeast Asia: Continuing explorations* (Routledge, 2011), pp. 157-166

previous dynasties.⁹ Therefore, more focus was shifting to the south and the western frontier. The idea that Vietnamese moving from the “Chinese World” to “Southeast Asian World” is not about the changing of political institution or ideology, but the turning of concern and attention from the northern periphery to the southern space. What comes across clearly from the sources is that mainland’s neighbours played indispensable role in Huế’s foreign policy which the dynasty produced large amount of knowledge, spent commitment, and used large scale military movement. By this mean, the Nguyễn set a new level of regional integration.

2. 1. Paradigm of the Early State

There is probably no other area in the world where our understanding of the past is changing so fast as in Southeast Asia. Also, there is no place of area study in which great academic attentions have paid to unfold the traditional pattern of political evolution than those for Southeast Asia. In the last century, both “outside” and “inside” scholarships have competed in understanding the region either as a distinct unity or the sub-cultural zone of India and China, and seeking for renewable conceptualized framework under which state in the region is narrated. Not surprisingly, the narratives variously show how the political image of Southeast Asia was looked through different angles of version which have never gone into one same direction.

Various forms of political movements experienced in the region during the last century are in many ways involving with the production of historical knowledge. The competing narrative between colonial, national, postcolonial and post-national historiographies interpreted different images of Southeast Asian past.¹⁰ Consequently, each generation of historian has produced their own version of understanding regional political template which various and usually controversial. Involving to the pattern of power relationship and political organization in space, three following notions can be

⁹ See Yu Insun, “Lịch sử quan hệ Việt Nam-Trung Quốc, (2009)

¹⁰ Abu Talib Ahmad and Tan Liok Ee, eds., New Terrains in Southeast Asian History (Athens: Ohio University: Research in International Studies and Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2003), especially, chapter 1. Writing at the Interstices: Southeast Asian Historians and Postnational Histories in Southeast Asia, by Thongchai Winichakul, pp. 3-29

put on the discussion: the Indianized state, mandala, and the Sino-Vietnamese model of tributary system.

Classical scholarship presenting by George Coedes, R. C. Majumdar, and D. G. E. Hall employed traces of art history and inscriptions as initially main categories to reconstruct early Southeast Asian history. As a result, vestiges of Hindu temples, the distribution density of the Sanskrit stelae, and Indian original myths gradually opened to the hypothesis of an Indianization era in the region. In a recent classification for Southeast Asian historiography, this Eurocentric approach to the regional history from the beginning of the 20th century to roughly the 1950s is recalled as “externalist historiography”.¹¹ Such western assumption see the colonial tendency of paving a solid way to understand early political organization of the so-called “Indianized states” via the themes of Indian kingship, religion and political rituals.¹² Southeast Asia was acknowledged as none but part of a greater source of civilization, such as “further India”, “Greater India” and “ancient Indian colonies”. The dominant template of the early twentieth century scholarship is the tendency to see history as shaped by influences external to the region rather than as the product of an internal dynamic.¹³

The emergence of Southeast Asia as part of area studies after the World War II, struggled to understand the region as a unity, as a domain of comparable if castrating societies, whose histories are distinct from the history of the Indian Subcontinent and East Asia.¹⁴ Various narratives of political history of traditional

¹¹ Victor Lieberman. Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global context, c. 800-1830. Vol. 1: Integration on the Mainland (Cambridge University Press, 2003); Majumdar, R.C. Ancient Indian Colonies in the Far East, Vol. 1: Champa (1927); and Vol. 2 : Suvarnavdipa (1937); Coedes, George. Histoire ancienne des etats hindouises d'Extreme-Orient, translated into English as The Indianized states of Southeast Asia, ed., by Walter F. Vella, translated by Susan Brown Cowing (Hawaii: East-West Center Press, 1968); Hall, D. G. E, A history of South-east Asia (London: Macmillan Limited, 1955)

¹² Coedes, The Indianized state, p. xvi

¹³ Legge, J.D. “The writing of Southeast Asian History”, in Nicholas Tarling, ed., The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia, Volume 1: From early times to c. 1800 (Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 6

¹⁴ Kenneth R. Hall and John K. Whitmore, ed., Explorations in Early Southeast Asian History: The Origin of Southeast Asian Statecraft (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1976); R. B. Smith and W. Watson, eds., Early South East Asia: essays in archaeology, history and historical geography (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), Tambiah, S. J., World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Jan Wisseman Christie, Theatre states

Southeast Asia place the region at the crossroad of not only of inter-Asia political movement but also of theoretical conceptualization. On the other hand, the dichotomy between colonial and indigenous historiography became focal discussion among scholarship on the region from the 1960s. Paul Mus and Van Leur offer a different perspective and interpretation by emphasizing more on the local factors and the of South East Asian autonomy.¹⁵ Debunking any outside approach to the regional historical discourse, Van Leur's analysis is significant for those start thinking of localization in southeast Asian part, and it is hardly avoid quoting his remark on Indonesian history, that “with the arrival of ships from western Europe, the point of view is turned a hundred and eighty degrees and from then on the Indies are observed from the deck of the ship, the ramparts of the fortress, the high gallery of the trading house”.¹⁶

Inspiring by Van Leur, autonomous historiography started emerging during the 1960s with John Smail and Harry J. Benda whose works opened an exhaustive discussion on the “inside-outside” dichotomy and the significant role of “the local”.¹⁷ By exploring the internal life of pre-colonial societies, those scholars commonly looked for, not to exclude foreign influences, but to indicate local response and adaptation to the external materials and forces.¹⁸ For historian of early Southeast Asian history, it seems to be a proper time to embody a new template under the theme of “localization” in seeking a new understanding of, and new illumination on “local knowledge”, “local genius” and

and oriental despotisms: *Early Southeast Asia in the eyes of the West* (Hull, England: Centre for South-East Asian Studies, 1985); Kenneth Hall, *Maritime Trade and State Development in Early Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1985), Kenneth R. Hall, *A History of Early Southeast Asia* (2010); Oliver Wolters, *History, Culture and Region* (1999); Craig J. Reynolds, *Seditious History: Contesting Thai and Southeast Asian Pasts* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press in association with Singapore University Press), p. ix

¹⁵Mus, Paul, “*Cultesindiens et indigenes au Champa*”, BEFEO, 33 (1933), translated into English as *Indian seen from the east – Indian and indigenous cults in Champa* (Monash papers on Southeast Asia, number three, 1975); Van Leur, *Indonesian Trade and Society* (The Hague: W. van Hoeve, 1955)

¹⁶ Van Leur, *Indonesian Trade and Society*, p. 261

¹⁷ Smail, John R.W., “On the possibility of an autonomous history of modern Southeast Asia”, *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. 2, No. 2, Jul., 1961, pp. 72-102; Harry J. Benda, The Structure of Southeast Asian History: Some Preliminary Observations, *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Mar., 1962), pp. 106-138; idem, Decolonization in Indonesia: The Problem of Continuity and Change, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 70, No. 4 (Jul., 1965), pp. 1058-1073

¹⁸ Lieberman. *Strange Parallels*, vol. 1, p. 11

the character of Southeast Asian agency in shaping regional paradigm of power and culture.¹⁹

In an attempt to indigenize concept of state in Southeast Asia before the coming of western power and political system, scholarship goes beyond western category of political science as producing concept for early Southeast Asian political network, the ‘mandala’. It is suggested to be applicable to the entire premodern period until the indigenous kingdoms were gradually replaced by territorial state with defined borders.²⁰ The Focus has been shifted more on the leadership in interpersonal relation of the “big men” or “men of prowess” which he considers as a cultural trait in early Southeast Asia. Wolters’ explanation leads to a suggestive paradigm of “a variable circle of power centered on a ruler, his palace, and the religious center from which he drew his legitimization”.²¹

Examining the mandala template as a power paradigm, it is clear that the more focuses are placed on power than politics. Such precolonial structure in some way is visualized as “galactic polity” which bases on a “concept of territory as a variable space, control over which diminished as royal power radiated from a center”. The royal center “ideologically represents the totally” and “there is a faithful reproduction on a reduce scale of the center in its outlying components”.²² And because: “The manada organization of space was not, however, an individual harsh reality in earlier Southeast Asia, though many ward have been recorded... Centers of spiritual authority and political power shifted endlessly”.²³ In the mandala paradigm, structure of power and its network are far more significant than spatial organization of state. Rulers live with central-peripheral orientation and consequently recognize the existence of different layers of politics at the same time. The view of “seeing like a state” is not so important in this circumstance because state has no capacity, and more significant, the feeling that such authority control is unnecessary as center keeps moving consistently.

¹⁹ Wolters, *History, Culture, and Region*, p. 57

²⁰ Reynolds, *Seditious Histories*, p. 38

²¹ Stuart-Fox and Mary Kooyman, *Historical dictionary of Laos* (MetHuén, New Jersey and London: Scarecrow Press, 1992), p. 85

²² Tambiah Stanley Jeyaraja, *Culture thought, and social action: An Anthropological perspective* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 260-61

²³ Wolters, *History, Culture and Region*, p. 28

Therefore, premodern power structure of the mainland is mainly dealt with the center and the leadership rather than politics and periphery. In the Tai world, dominant element of socio-spatial structure is ban-muang political system, a small polity focus on rice growing river-plain with dependent villages in more remote areas of the river valley and in the mountainous areas of the surrounding watershed.²⁴

Competing narrative of early state/ political organization in Southeast Asia reflects various interpretations in shaping contour of social and power structure for thousand years before the colonialism. These controversies concern to power relationship, kinship, kingship and politico-religious practice of legitimation and authority. At the regional level of power paradigm, the practice of power over space and indigenous conceptualization of geopolitics becomes focal convergence of debate contributing to pattern of intra-regional interaction. Such indigenous imaginary spatial depiction relates not only to the practice of authority but also to the management of land and manpower on the geographical surface.

Conventional scholarship on Southeast Asia regularly draws a contrast between the structure and dynamics of the early regional polities on the one hand and those of western and Chinese ones on the other. The Chinese is believed as pioneer in developing a “truly modern” bureaucracy by which there is no land is not belonged to the imperial domain and there is no single person not belonged to the imperial subject. As a result of this assumption:

“China and Southeast Asia are characterized as enjoying two totally different ratios of people to land: in China, as in Europe, land is the scarce resource that the state must occupy and guard (hence the crucial role of walls – or fences – open country), while in Southeast Asia people are the scarce resource that political actors, state and non-state, must attract or capture (hence the importance of the walled place-city or citadel as the focus for the gathering of followers and slaves – albeit there was never a stark distinction between “free” and “slave” as in Western contexts). The high ratio of people to land has, it is thought, permitted Western and Chinese state greater freedom to apply coercion

²⁴ Andrew Walker, The Legend of the Golden Boat, p. 6

on subjects since the latter cannot “vote with their feet” and abscond to “empty” hinterlands.”²⁵

However, recently the premises have been questioned by Richard O’Connor about those distinctive features of the region, manpower-not-land center-not-boundaries, and power-not-politics.²⁶

Coming across several proposal paradigms, the Oriental despotism, hydraulic society of monsoon Asia, the Marxist Asiatic mode of production (AMP), the mandala, the Theatre state (Negara), and the Dynastic state, many of them directly deal with the quest of political and economic organization over space such as collecting people at the frontier, resettling them in the core center, and then utilizing those manpower for cultivating land, building state project, and warfare.²⁷ Apart from that, prior to the nineteenth century, large area of mainland Southeast Asia was living in absence of state structure at the frontier of agrarian societies.²⁸ The relationship between two “worlds” is largely neglected due to the fact that traditional historiography mainly concentrates on the center’s version and keeps virtually silent of all peripheries. Work by James Scott sheds light upon more evidences concerning to the core-periphery model of premodern social formation. Thongchai suggests in his work that there is the weakness of the central control in peripheral area, and the lack of clearly defined conceptualization in making the border. In his words, power radiated “like a candle’s light”, from a central point, diminished with distance. At the same time, complex terrains of jungle, mountain, and “blank space” of the borderlands were exhausted altogether or overlapped with the dim radiances of other

²⁵ Andrew J. Abalain, “Can Heaven have two Sons, or Did the Chinese get Funan right? Imperial Chinese as Primus Inter Pares among Sino-Pacific mandala polities”, paper presented at the International Conference on Imperial China and its Southern Neighbors, ISEAS, Singapore June 2012

²⁶ Richard O’Connor, “Critiquing the Critique of Southeast Asia: beyond texts and state to culture history”, in Anthony Reid, ed., Southeast Asia Studies: The Pacific Perspectives, (Temple, Arizona: Program in Southeast Asian Studies, Monograph Series, Arizona State University, 2003), pp. 74-80

²⁷ Văn Tạo, Phương thức sản xuất châu Á – lý luận Marx - Lênin và thực tiễn Việt Nam [Asiatic mode of production: Marx-Leninist theory and the Vietnamese circumstance] (Hanoi: NXB Khoa học xã hội, 1996); Wittfogel, Karl, A., Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957); Clifford Geertz, Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980); Wotlers, History, Culture and Region (1999), Stuart-Fox, Martin, Political Pattern in Southeast Asia”, in Eastern Asia: An Introductory History, ed., by Colin Mackerras (Longman: 2000); Craig J. Reynolds, Seditious History, pp. 31-52

²⁸ James C. Scott, The Art of Not Being Governed, pp. 3-4

remote centers. Some borderlanders, like the “tribal people wandering in the mountain forest [who] were subjects of no power” seem to escape central authority and regulation altogether. Because of the lack of a clearly defined boundary, borderland was likely a “zone of ambiguity, flexibility and nonchalance, well outside the historical trajectories of the region’s main power”.²⁹

In this part, by analyzing different ways premodern society manages space, I try to cast light on suggestive power paradigm concerning to periphery, semi-periphery and beyond. The dominant assumption is that before the eighteenth century, state in the region is believed in no ambition to extend its domain by focusing on controlling land. The practice of this tradition may be various from people to people. The Burmese for centuries tried to maintain the power structure and administrative system over the three main political spaces of the nuclear zone, the zone of dependent provinces, and the zone of tributary.³⁰ Other, like Srivijaya, Champa enjoyed the “politics of plunder”.³¹ For the Indian Golconda King in the 1680s, the Siamese vast land is space of “forests and mosquitoes”, meanwhile his kingdom is smaller, but full of men”.³² In fact, the population density in the Southeast Asia in 1600 was roughly 5.5 persons per square kilometer (compared with roughly 35 for India and China).³³

²⁹ Thongchai, *Siam Mapped*, (1994), pp. 73-75, 79, 99-100; Andrew Walker, *The Legend of the Golden Boat*, pp. 6-7

³⁰ Victor Lieberman, *Burmese Administrative Cycles: Anarchy and Conquest, c. 1580-1760* (Princeton, N. J: Princeton University Press, 1984)

³¹ Chau Ju-kua, *Chau Ju-kua: his work on the Chinese and Arab trade in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries*, entitled *Chu-fan-chi*, trans. from the Chinese and annotated by Friedrich Hirth and W.W. Rockhill (Oriental Press, 1966); Oliver Wolters, *Early Indonesian Commerce: A Study of Srivijaya* (Ithaca, N. Y: Cornell University Press, 1967), Momoki Shiro, “Was Champa a Pure Maritime Polity? Agriculture and Industry Recorded in Chinese Documents”. Presented at 1998 Core University Seminar, Kyoto University and Thammasat University, “Eco-History and Rise/Demise of the Dry Areas in Southeast Asia”, Kyoto University Japan, October 13-16, 1998, Kenneth R. Hall, “The Politics of Plunder in the Cham Realm of Early Vietnam”, in *Art and Politics in Southeast Asia History: Six Perspectives*, ed. Robert van Neil (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Southeast Asian Paper, No. 32, 1989), pp. 5-32, idem, “An Economic History of Early Southeast Asia”, in *Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, Vol. 1, ed., Nicholas Tarling (Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 252-60,

³² Nicolas Gervaise, *The Natural and Political History of the Kingdom of Siam*, trans. John Villiers (Bangkok, 1989), p. 27

³³ Colin McEvedy and Richard Jones, *Atlas of World Population History* (London, 1978), pp. 166–97, Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450–1680*, vol. 1, *The Lands Below the Winds* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 15; James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 4

Thus, there is no surprise that the Siamese during the Ayutthaya and early Bangkok Era searched for manpower from any directions and in any military campaigns.³⁴

However, those examples indicate the obvious fact that indigenous ideology of space and boundary seem to overlook and underestimate in modern scholarship on Southeast Asia. In this respect, there is a clear and rigid frontier dividing the premodern geographical discourse and the shape of modern nation state: the coming of western ideas of geography, territory, and boundary. The phenomenon sometime is described as a revolution helps to dismiss “the law of Southeast Asian inertia” which have dominated the indigenous peoples for thousands years.³⁵ Among scholarship on Southeast Asia, Thongchai has successfully described the evolution of Siamese perception of space, territory, boundary, and sovereignty between the traditional cosmology and modern geography. The suggestion is that, “as with other nations outside Europe, historical regards Siam’s struggles against European imperialism in the nineteenth century as the advent of the modern nation”. By this mean, despite “premodern societies never lacked the knowledge and technology to conceive the space”, the fact is “the geo-body” of the Siamese modern nation is essentially a product of “modern geography”, “clashes of concepts of boundary”, conflicts and treaties with the West, and the introduction of mapping in western style as a new technology of space.³⁶

Traditional idea of space in Southeast Asia was significantly relied on religious cosmology, and submission rather than the precisely geographical expression. Therefore, examining the idea of God-king [Devaraja], universal Buddhist monarch *Cakkravatin* may provide a better understanding that flexibility and fluidity

³⁴ David Chandler, Facing the Cambodian Past (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1996), p. 91, mentioned a palm leaf chronicle at Wat Srolauv [1856], in north central Cambodia suggested that during the wartime, many Khmer escaped into Siam and King Rama III “allowed to settle and grow rice” along the border; also Mayoury Ngaosyvathn and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn, Paths to Conflagration, p. 231. The search for manpower was continuous increase in Siam between 1778 and 1828. Mayoury and Pheuiphanh also demonstrated vividly this phenomenon in case of Laos, see “Slave Raids in Lao Areas”, pp. 45-50. Puangthong also mentioned about the Siamese control the Khmer population in Cambodian western provinces of Battambang and Siam Reap, Puangthong Rungwasdisab, “War and Trade”, chapter. VI; Pasuk Phongpaichit & Chris Baker, Thailand: Economy and Politics (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 13

³⁵ Victor Lieberman, Strange Parallels, vol. 1, p. 8

³⁶ Thongchai, Siam Mapped, pp. x, 13, 18, 37, 68-69, 113

of space is part of regional traditional political culture. The concept of mandala itself lies on inter-and-intraregional relationship stipulating by kinship, religious relationship and loyalty network. That is, “in practice, the mandala represented a particular and often unstable political situation in a vaguely definable geographical area without fixed boundaries and where smaller centers tended to look in all directions for security.”³⁷

The fluid power organization however is built in space with different categories. The idea of “selfness” and “otherness” can be critical, but it seems strongly overlooked in analyzing the structure of pre-modern society. The way “selfness” and “otherness” are defined very much influences on the recognition of state/peoples toward space, and identity: where state authority should stop, and who should be included into its list of subject. What did people of Angkor, Ayutthaya, Pagan, and Đại Việt really mean when they mentioned about themselves and the others? And what was the sense of belonging implicated to different ethnics within those political domains? As Victor Lieberman points out, the situation of early Tai political interaction between the 13th and the 18th centuries is that “Tai-speakers per se had no collective identity, but a separate language and religious and social organization often permitted individual Tai groups to maintain their distinctiveness vis-à-vis Mons, Khmers, and hill peoples”.³⁸

And in 1428, a Đại Việt’s mandarin, Nguyễn Trãi announced victory over the Ming’s invasion:

“Now think upon this Đại Việt land of ours
Truly is it a cultured nation
Our mountains and rivers have their characteristics features,
But our habits and customs are not the same from north to south
It was the Trieu, the Dinh, the Ly and Tran
Who is succession built this country
Even as the Han, the Tang, and Sung and Yuan,
Each was sovereign in its own domain”.³⁹

³⁷ Wolter, *History, Culture and Region*, pp. 27-8

³⁸ Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*, vol. 1, p. 241

³⁹ Nguyễn Trãi, *Bình Ngô Đại Cáo*, translated in Stephen O’ Harrow, Nguyễn Trãi’s *Bình Ngô Đại Cáo* of 1428: The Development of a Vietnamese National Identity, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Mar., 1979), pp. 159-174, MomokiShiro, *Geo-body Vietnam* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2010),

The main subject of the proclamation was citizens of Đại Việt 大越 kingdom who were equally civilized and independent as Han Chinese 漢人. The declaration therefore had no place for “barbarians” and other ethnics who could not read Chinese or Sino-Vietnamese, practice wet-rice agriculture, and follow Confucian repertoire regardless of their location inside the kingdom’s domain or not. In other important work on geography, *Dư Địa Chí* [Geography, c. 1435], there was no clear differentiation among ethnicity apart from the civilized Viet 越 and barbarian non-Viet who live in un-healthy space.⁴⁰ In this worldview, the feeling of selfness and the differentiation of otherness was ethnically and culturally too strong which until the late eighteenth century Nguyễn Ánh instructed that “*Hán di hữu hạn*”: the Viet [越] and the barbarians must have a clear border.⁴¹ The view also reflects from the Viet’s legal system. All the non-Viet are generally regarded with suspicion and some disdain. Article 333 in the Lê Code held that any government functionaries or employees who contracted marriages with indigenous highland chiefs would be punished.⁴²

The idea of “selfness” and “otherness” comes into association with distinctive various layers of space from the state view. As state moves beyond space, it also encompasses different linguistic and cultural zones, economic nature and political organization. And therefore, a power paradigm is not only speaks for geopolitical structure but also the way state organizes its structure and manage economic network. These elements are interdependent and thus any motion for change can be equally important to shape new template of integration along the Mekong.

Research in the last decades shows the economic integrity of mainland Southeast Asian history in the pre-modern period.⁴³ Several economic networks stretched from the northern mainland Southeast Asia to the Lower Mekong River

⁴⁰ Nguyễn Trãi, “*Dư Địa Chí*” [Geography], in *Nguyễn Trãi Toàn Tập* [Completed collections of Nguyễn Trãi’s Works], Vol. 2 (Hanoi: Nxb Văn học và trung tâm nghiên cứu Quốc học, 2001)

⁴¹ DNTL, 1, 5:23 b, see Choi, *Southern Vietnam*, p. 34

⁴² Hickey, *Sons of the Mountains*, p. 154

⁴³ See Vu Duc Liem, *From Bangkok to Sài Gòn: The Emergence of An Economic Space, 1782-1858*, paper presented at the 11th International Conference on Thai Studies, (Mahidol University: Bangkok, 2011)

Delta in the south.⁴⁴ This new economic landscape of the nineteenth century mainland, however, poses the quest of reconstructing the contemporary correlative political landscape in which, economic interaction was generated. By sharpening the tools of historical analysis we can easily realize that there is a convergence of view of scholarship relating to political history of the mainland Southeast Asia in pre-modern time. At the first glance, the political interaction in the mainland still is dominantly captured by the traditional perspectives, especially in the cases of Siam and Vietnam as key political players. That traditional model of politics and power under influence by religious philosophy, notably the *Buddhist cakkavatin* and the *Sino-Vietnamese tributary system*, nonetheless, seem not to show very well either the scale of political development in the early nineteenth century mainland or the practical application of local political philosophy in shaping their power network over the Mekong River Valley on the eve of establishing of the French Indochina.

In this respect, this academic gap has been challenged elsewhere by the very scholars who have been mainly interested in early regional political history. Sunait Chutintaranond, a prominent Thai historian, has conducted numerous research on pre-modern Siamese-Burmese warfare in general and on the idea of *cakkavartin* in particular. He points out that the *cakkavartin* concept functioned as an ideological motivation of Siamese and Burmese kings in traditional warfare. In reality, the kings created within their imaginary *Jambudipa* the realm of their own *mandala* or ‘field of power’, in which they contended to become the most powerful *cakkavartin* king. However, their *mandala* never overlapped until the first half of the 16th century, after the old Mon kingdom was totally incorporated as part of the Burmese political domain and after the interior capital, Toungoo, was abandoned and replaced by Pegu, who also wanted to control over the trans-peninsular traffic with the Gulf of Siam. Furthermore, in the practical level, Sunait has, in his analysis, suggested that the outbreak of warfare was a result of important demands politico-economically in Siam

⁴⁴ Chiranan Prasertkul, *Yunnan trade in the nineteenth century: Southwest China's cross-boundaries functional system*, (Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1989), Puangthong Ruangwasdisab, *War and Trade: Siamese Intervention in Cambodia, 1767-1851*, Ph. D dissertation, University of Wollongong, 1995, Li Tana and Nola Cooke (eds). *Water Frontier*, (Singapore: Rowman & Littlefield publishers, INC, 2004)

and Burma, notably, the control of seaports, trading routes, sources of trading goods, manpower and corvée system, collecting taxes, and so on.⁴⁵

The significance of those suggestions is that they encourage scholarship to go beyond the traditional scholarly perception on Siamese-Vietnamese power relationship which tends to play down the local factor, and underestimate local level of development in the premodern time. Further, there has been an encouragement for an alternative way to approach the Siamese-Vietnamese political system of the early nineteenth century through a more practical perspective, a politics of pragmatism. The more emphasis should be drawn to the movement of peoples and authority in space in creating new landscape of political organization. Essentially, the Mekong valley performs in a common rhythm of change running by both Siamese and Vietnamese mass project of political reconstruction. As a result, a structure of geopolitics comes out.

2. 2. Structure of Power in the Premodern Mekong Valley

This part explores the integration of the Mekong Valley as a social and political space by bringing together movement of peoples and changing geopolitics in space and time. Such integrated view of the Mekong has been neglected in some way due to the fact of complex terrain, of ethnic and cultural diversity, and of waned and waxed politics. Dealing with the Mekong basin as a whole, the place from historical perspective presents defining features to acknowledge its existence and signify a coherent spatial structure among the Chao Phraya basin in the west, the narrow littoral in the east and the Mekong itself in the middle. As a geographical entity of more than 307,000 square mile-drains (795,000 square kilometers) land, stretching from the Tibetan plateau to the South China Sea, the Mekong river creates a huge network of human landscape. It is estimated that seventy-seven percent of its drainage area lies within four countries traversed by its lower basin – Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Sunait Chutintaranond. Cakravartin: the Ideology of Traditional Warfare in Siam and Burma, 1548-1605, Ph. D dissertation, Ithaca: Cornell University, 1990, idem, On both sides of the Tenasserim range: history of Siamese Burmese relations, (Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1995)

⁴⁶ Sachchidanand Sahai, The Mekong river: Space and Social Theory, p. 15

Through history, politically speaking, with the exception of Angkor and seventh century Lan Xang of Sourigna Vongsa, Lao and Khmer polities are relatively weaker than its neighbours of Ayutthaya and Đại Việt 大越 and usually playing as vassal states. Economic and demographic superiority of the latter undoubtedly and inevitably allows them to be hubs of imperial consolidation.⁴⁷ Therefore, power structure of the Mekong relies significantly on centers are not directly locating along this river (Sài Gòn is exceptional in this sense). For centuries, Thăng Long/ Hà Nội, Huế, Ayutthaya, Thonburi, and Bangkok run the template of historical development throughout the region by expanding influence toward the Mekong basin.

Fifteenth century Le dynasty of Đại Việt led an extraordinary campaign into the Mekong through muang Laos, Nan, Chiang Mai and possibly even to the Irrawaddy basin. In the late 1479, the chronicle of *Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư* 大越史記全書 [Complete History of Đại Việt] reported that emperor Lê Thánh Tông 黎聖宗 dispatched troops in a western campaign, to the area of Lan Xang and other Tai polities in the middle Mekong. Citing the Chinese classics (the Books of Changes and of Poetry and the Rituals of Zhou), the king called on his force to spread righteousness and virtue through the mountains. This doubtless screened his preparations and troop movements as he and his staff worked out the major campaign itself. The campaign emerged fully planned in September (8th lunar month) of 1479 and entailed a staggered attack along five separate routes through the mountains against the opposing Tai positions.⁴⁸ Later, the dynastic chronicle also mentions that the Le king in Thăng Long [Hà Nội] was informed of full victory, even some commanders' letters introduced the King that Vietnamese troops went over Nan, Chiang Mai and only stopped at the Irrawaddy River's bank.

“In the year of pig [1479], August, 23”, king Lê Thánh Tông dispatched 180,000 troops to campaign westward in order to defeat Ai Lao/ Lan Xang [Laos] who was attacking border areas. After capturing Lan Xang, Vietnamese troops were

⁴⁷ Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*, vol. 2, 2009, pp. 14-5

⁴⁸ John K. Whitmore, “The two great campaigns of the Hong Duc era (1470–97) in Đại Việt, *South East Asia Research*, p. 132; idem, ‘*Colliding peoples: Tai/Viet interactions in the 14th and 15th centuries*’, Association of Asian Studies, San Diego, CA, 2000

described that in glorious victory and “went into Kim Sa River [Irrawaddy River], next to Burmese southern borders, received Burmese Letters and came back”.⁴⁹

The campaign unsurprisingly became well-known among Tai polities and was widely recorded in many chronicles of Nan, Chiang Mai and even in a Burmese *Yazawin* (chronicle) of Chiang Mai, *Zinme Yazawin*.⁵⁰ In the document, the Vietnamese is mentioned as “*Sein Kathe*”, and the event is happened in the year of 1483 (instead of 1479 in the Vietnamese dynastic records).⁵¹

“The Viet said, “our lord ordered 400,000 men and four commanders to destroy and capture Muang Khoua, Muang Nan and Chiang Mai to bring under authority all the lands captured. We marched again Langchang and captured it. From Langchang, we came to Nan. Over 400,000 warriors were assembled and encamped there when Thao Kha Kan came with over 40,000 men and attacked and defeated us. Three commanders were killed and over 200,000 warriors were also killed. We dare not say definitely whether 100,000 [Gi-reverse] of them remained or not”.⁵²

In addition, Nan and Chiang Mai did cooperation and defeated Vietnamese troops. Lord of Muang Nan, Thao Kha Han fight against Viet with only 40,000 troops and under supporting of Chiang Mai King, Sri Saddhamma Tiloka Cakkavattiraja. In the battle fields, the 400, 000 Viet were defeated; over 10,000 were captured alive and the dead numbered over 300,000. The head of three commanders were cut off and presented.⁵³

⁴⁹ Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư [hereafter DVSKTT], pp. 489-90

⁵⁰ Thingyan, Sithu Gaman, Zinme Yazawin: Chronicle of Chiang Mai, translated by Thaw Kuang and Ni NiMyint. (Yangon: Universities Historical Research Center, 2003)

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 36

⁵² Ibid, p. 40

⁵³ Ibid, p. 39



It is important to realize that the campaign has made the tremendous impact in northern Mainland Southeast Asia at that time not only because for the first time Vietnamese had dispatched troops westward, into Tai world, but it supported for regional integration in which Đại Việt, LanXang [Laos], Lana and other Tai Polities were step by step engaging together in a new regional political and economic network. Because of its significance, the construction of the historical event is crucial to help promote our understanding how and in what ways, Vietnam could move hundreds thousands troops westward, for thousands of kilometers, and how local people's responses that led to the defeat of Vietnamese.

The fifteenth century Vietnamese movement into the Mekong opened for new interaction of Burmese, Tai and others into the central and lower Mekong.⁵⁴Chiang

⁵⁴ Jon Fernquist, The flight of Lao war captives from Burma back to Laos in 1596: a comparison of historical sources, *SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Spring 2005; Marini, G.F. de., *A New and Interesting Description of the Lao Kingdom (1642- 1648)*, translated by Walter E. J. Tips and Claudio Bertuccio (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1998); Grabowsky, Volker, *Forced Resettlement Campaigns In Northern Thailand During the Early Bangkok Period. Source Materials on Thai History c 1600-1855: Reappraisals and Discoveries, 5th International Conference on Thai Studies - SOAS, London 1993*; Grabowsky, Volker., "The Northern Tai Polity of Lan Na (Babai-Dadian) Between the Late 13th to Mid-16th Centuries: Internal Dynamics and Relations with Her Neighbors." *Asia Research Institute Working Paper No. 17*, The National University of Singapore,

Mai, Ayutthaya, Burma, and Nguyễn Cochinchina became more active powers during the sixteenth and seventh centuries in involving with LanXang and Cambodia politics. Warfare, war captives and caravan trade foster the connection between the Mekong and other centers not very far from it. With the rise of the Burmese, Tai Ayutthaya, and Lana, sixteenth century central Mekong became more dependent on the western mainland. The flow of war captive is among the main human movement among those powers. The campaign of Bayinnaung in LanXang between 1565 and 1571 for instance, was reported by the traveler, de Marini that after conquering Pegu and Siam, the “king of Ava” conquered Laos whose inhabitants “he removed and forced to go to Pegu to populate that country”. By the end of that century, a thousand of them tried to escape to LanXang through Chiang Mai, an ally of Pegu.⁵⁵

To the lower Mekong, the emergence of the Nguyễn Cochinchina and its moving both southward and westward rapidly filled a “blank space” of power left by the decline of the Khmer division. By the middle of the seventeenth century, after annexation of Hà Tiên and the most parts of the lower Mekong, Nguyễn Lord directly involved with Cambodian politics where they faced Siamese same ambition to control the Khmer kingdom and seaports in the Gulf of Thailand. Politics of rice, manpower, and to some extent, of land, place Cambodia as victim in the between of a “tug of war” game for centuries before

If one looks at the Mekong valley from this perspective, it is intriguing to describe the whole region as fields of power. And toward the end of eighteenth century, more powers appeared to challenge autonomous existence of the Mekong’s periphery. Centers of the “field” were consistently shifted among Angkor, Lana, Sukhotai, LanXang, Auythaya, Thongburi, Hanoi, Huế, and Sài Gòn. Although except Angkor and Sài Gòn, other centers do not directly involve with the Mekong River, they enormously engage with political influence of the Mekong’s space. Thai and Vietnamese in the last one thousand year perspective deal with groups along the Mekong as periphery of their state making. The Vietnamese went southward along the

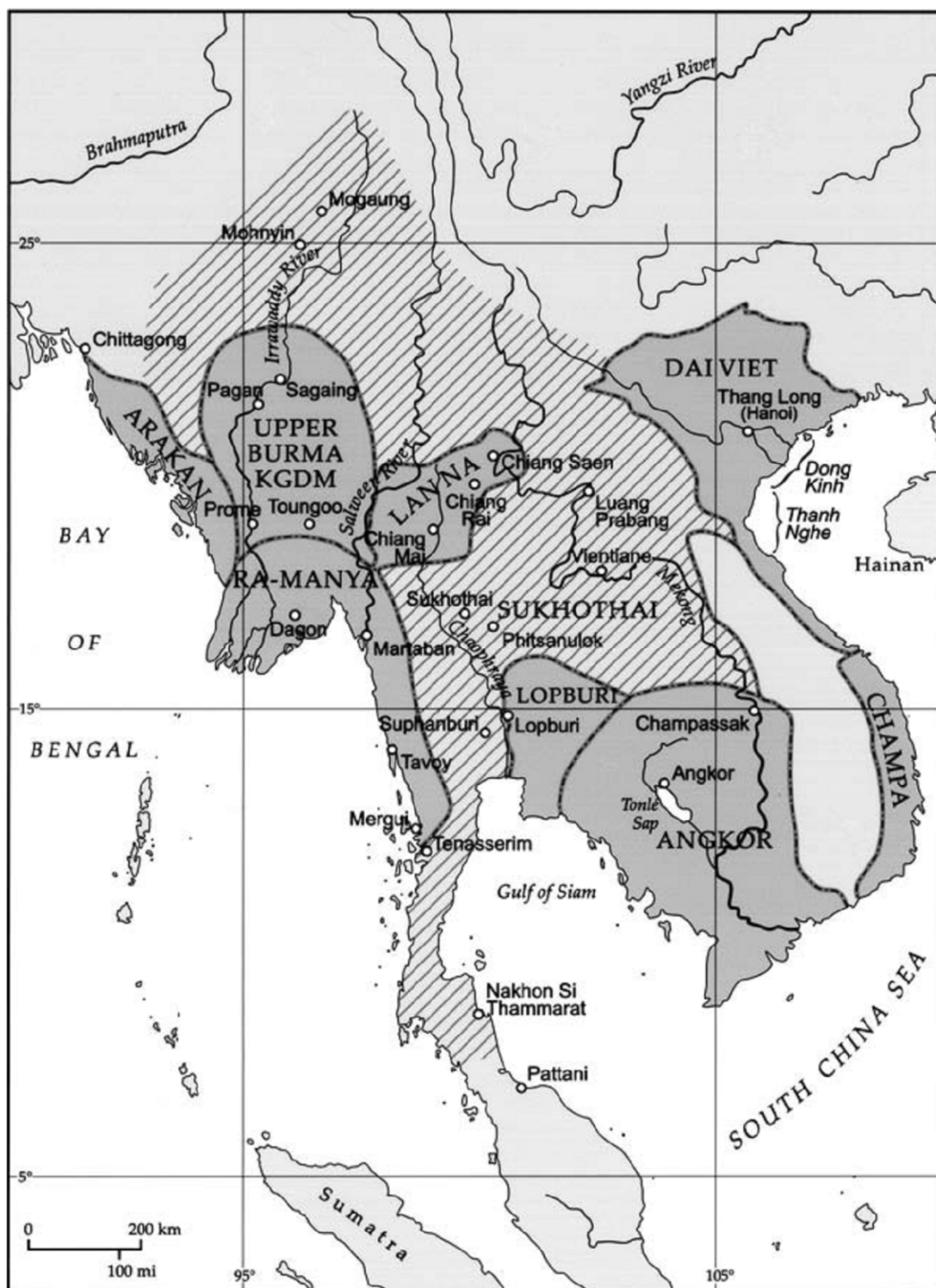
2004; Cushman, Richard D, The Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya: A Synoptic Translation, edited by David K. Wyatt (Bangkok: The Siam Society, 2000)

⁵⁵ Marini, G.F. de, A New and Interesting Description, p. 26

coast meanwhile the Thai went down along the Chao Phraya River. Imperial historiography thus narrates Laos and Cambodia as fragmentary histories or sub-histories of the main stream created by Vietnamese and Siamese.⁵⁶

Changing power network in the Mekong has come as the Siamese and Vietnamese started territorially recognizing the region and showing their increasingly interest toward hills and mountains. Of course, these are great powers along the Mekong, comprising Angkor and LanXang, but when the Siamese and Vietnamese came to power by the late eighteen century they faced no challenge in dealing with polities along the Mekong. Between the 16th century and the 18th century overlapping influential zone between Siam and Đại Việt was significantly expanded into Cambodia and Laos, particularly to economic and population centers. The confrontation was widely conducted by military expedition to control manpower, trade and fertile land for agricultural cultivation. The Vietnamese continuously moved southward and finally annexed Champa as well as the Lower Mekong Delta which was somehow under the patronage of the Khmer kings. In the central mainland, Lana, Lanxang, Burmese, Ayutthaya, Cambodia were always in the situation of warfare. This political landscape suggests that the paradigm of power in the mainland was in the time of transition from the classic *mandala* system into more centralized kingdoms of the premodern era. The two maps below describe the Mekong region between 14th and early 19th centuries. During this period of time, a vast area has been incorporated or annexed into part of central state. Others were increasingly becoming dependent or being attracted by central power for protection and security.

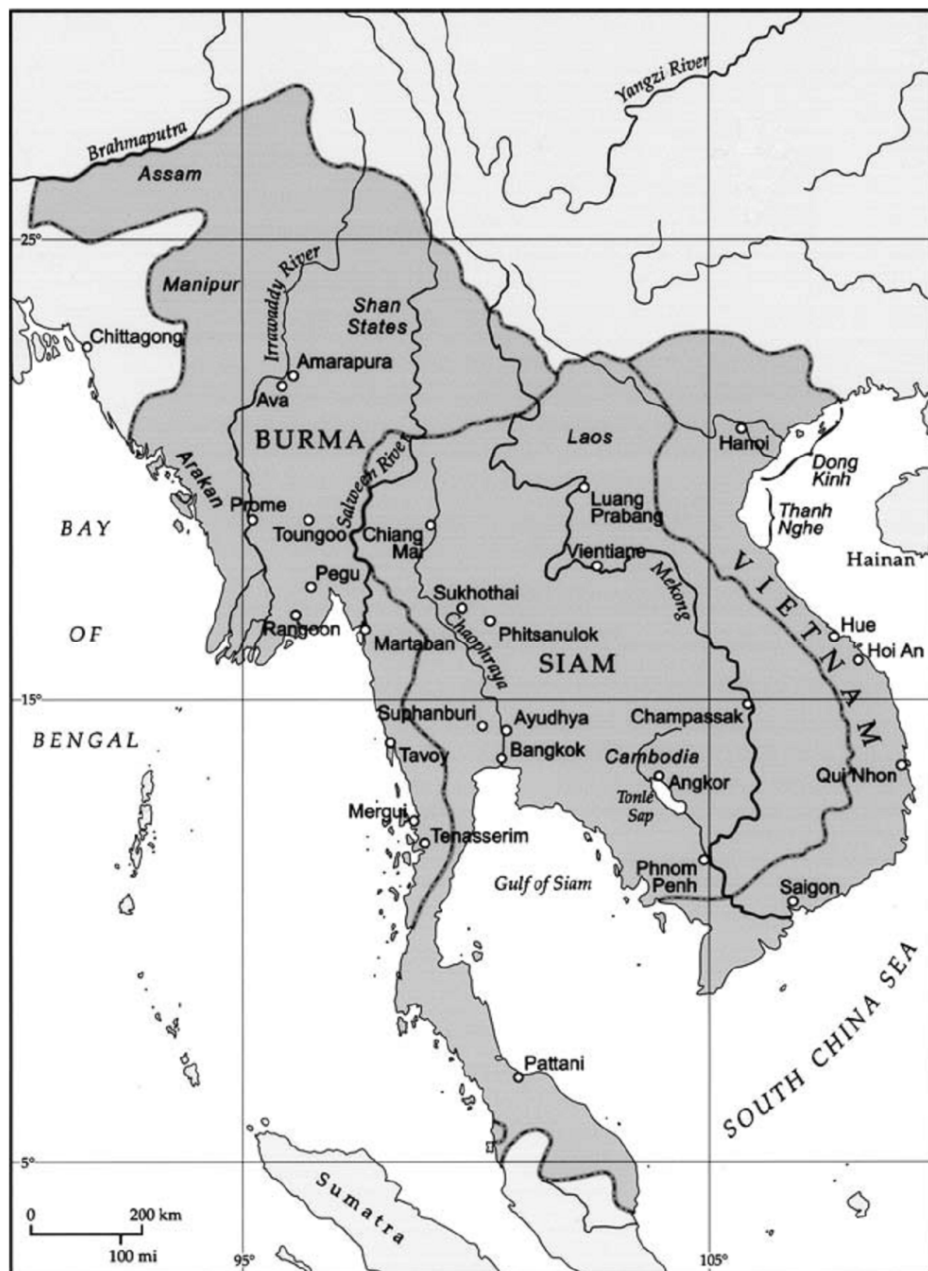
⁵⁶ David Chandler, "Cambodia before the French: Politics in a Tributary Kingdom, 1794–1848". (PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1974, Eiland, Michael, Dragon and Elephant: Relations between Vietnam and Siam, 1782-1847, Ph.D dissertation, George Washington University, 1989, Bun SrunTheam, Cambodia in the Mid-19th Century: A Quest for Survival, MA Thesis, The Australian National University, 1981; Mayoury Ngaosyvathn, Paths to conflagration: fifty years of diplomacy and warfare in Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam, 1778-1828, (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1998), Ralph Smith, "Cambodia" and "Vietnam" in a regional perspective (16th –19 Centuries), in N. T. Anh and Alain Forest, eds., Guerre et paix en Asie du Sud-Est, (Paris, Editions L'Harmattan, 1998)



Map of Mainland Southeast Asia, c. 1340

The hatched area represents a zone of fluid, generally small-scale Tai polities

Source: Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*, vol. 2, 2009, p. 13



Map of the Mainland Southeast Asia in 1824
 Source: Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*, vol. 2, 2009, p. 14

What clearly comes from the maps is that, there is consistent expansion of state institution into the “blank space of power” along the Mekong. Defining feature of the Mekong space is margin of several state making and if one looked at this area from the last five hundred year perspective, Siamese and Vietnamese made an extraordinary advance by expanding along both side of the river and this process of

expansion creates. By the late eighteenth century, power relationship then became more diverse and complex, especially in the case of Laos and Cambodia. The natural feature of the Mekong provided the western powers a border that could easily be defined and controlled. However such colonial boundary “divided traditional polities possessing political and cultural identities that had developed over centuries”. For many groups living along the Mekong, the river “was never a border but their most important lifeline (saisiwit).”⁵⁷ Historically speaking, their economic activities, power relationship and human mobilization were expended to both banks of the river in a landscape of uncontested sovereignty of modern nation-state.

In term of territorial integration in the mainland, periodization can be taken into three main phrases, prior to the early nineteenth century.

The first phrase, early centuries AD to the 15th century, it is the time of early kingdoms and empires.⁵⁸ The paradigm of power in the mainland this period shows that those main *mandala* systems almost had no overlapping zone. Accordingly, the main way of maintaining power network is to build a “loyalty network”, rather than military campaign. It means that the mean of kinship relation, religious ceremony were widely used to attract smaller political entities from any directions. Those smaller *mandala* have more than one choice, in case they do not want to become a vassal state, it has chance to escape to build a new kingdom or established a new *mandala* far from this political and military threat. The Mons has moved southward far from Bagan, the Cham has moves southward far from the Vietnamese, the Khmer abandoned Angkor, and later political centers of the Tai kept moving southward far from older ones to the north.

The second phrase, from the 16th century to the 18th century, overlapping zone was expanded, especially over economic and population centers as well as strategic port cities where trading benefits was generated. The confrontation among *mandala* was widely conducted by military expedition, even in order to destroy each other.

⁵⁷ Christopher E. Goscha and Soren Ivarsson, eds., Contesting Visions of the Lao Past: Lao Historiography at the Crossroads (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2003), p. xvii, also see Volker Grabowsky, “Chiang Khaeng 1893-1896: A Lue principality in the Upper Mekong Valley at the Center of Franco-British Rivalry”, in Contesting Visions of Lao Past, pp. 71-96, idem, Chronicles of Chiang Khaeng: Tai Lu principality of the upper Mekong (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2011)

⁵⁸ H. Kulke, “The early and the Imperial Kingdom in Southeast Asian History”, in David G. Marr, Anthony Crothers Milner, eds., Southeast Asia in the 9th to 14th centuries, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1986), pp. 1-23

This seems to go beyond the Indian primitive concept of *mandala* which intentionally differentiate at least three types of neighbors: allies [*mitra*], enemies [*ari*], and neutrals [*madhyama*].⁵⁹ In fact, most of main *mandala* in the mainland those days came under conflict in order to control manpower, trade and new fertile land for agricultural expansion. The Vietnamese continuously moved southward and finally annexed Champa as well as the Lower Mekong Delta which was somehow under the patronage of the Khmer kings. On the central mainland, Lana, Lanxang, Burmese, Ayutthaya, Cambodia were always in the situation of warfare. This political landscape suggests that the paradigm of power in the mainland was in the time of transition from the *mandala* network into centralized kingdoms of the era of pre-modern state making. Thus, it is clear that the diverse political pattern during this period came as results of political confrontation between the autonomy and centralization tendency.

The third phrase, from the late eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century is characterized by the political centralization in which only three main powers could engage with regional competition. In this respect, the new political context contributes to the emergence of centralized kingdoms and to expand their power over several overlapping zones. The vital change of the power paradigm of power in the mainland this period is that the building of “loyalty network” was placed by annexation territory, sending troop in capturing permanently, and putting tributary zones under direct central control. This territorial extension needs new effective internal administrative system which was followed by new political philosophy, that is, in our belief, the political of space over core, periphery, and overlapping zone. And the rest of this paper will show how this political philosophy contributes to shape the new paradigm of power in the mainland Southeast Asia between 1820 and 1851.

⁵⁹ R. Shamasastri, Kautilya's Arthasastra, 4th ed., (Mysore, 1951), pp. 290, 303-04, 329-30

2. 3. Confucianism, Power, and the World Order of Đại Nam

Competing narrative of the Nguyễn is now becoming a focal point of modern historiographical debate in Vietnam. At least dozen of both national and international conferences since 1977 have been organized in efforts of “re-recognition” (*nhận thức lại*) and “re-assessment” (*đánh giá lại*) the Nguyễn. Two among those controversial agendas deal with state of development of the Vietnamese society and its foreign policy toward the western powers which are described as the direct responsibility to the Vietnamese colonialism. Vietnam’s regional relation however maintains a pretty empty space, especially with other mainland countries of Laos, Cambodia and Siam. The reason mainly contributes to this can be precisely found in the modern political and territorial relationship between those nations.

Recognizing the Mekong valley as a political space, this section shall brings some elements of the controversy of the Nguyễn regarding to the creation of regional integration. It will unfold the rise of Vietnam by examining different elements of power and diplomatic world view in forming Huế’s foreign policy. A closer analysis is made to define the root of Nguyễn authority and factor impact on Đại Nam’s western expansion. The issue deals with lot of contradictory views, even within characteristics of nationalist narrative although scholars share the same source of dynastic chronicles.

Before the national conference in 2002, holding on the occasion of two hundred year the establishment of the Nguyễn (1802), it is a common view that the dynasty was weak and had to rely on foreign support to come to power. It is highly shameful, from the nationalism discourse, to “let the snake into the family henhouse” (*công rắn cắn gà nhà*). In addition, Nguyễn Kings had portrayed as failed and incapable rulers either in domestic policy or foreign affairs concerning to the involvement in the Mekong basin. The famous figures have been cited over and over in historical textbooks show a grey picture of Đại Nam society in the early nineteenth century. Four hundred rebellions and revolts of peasants, highland ethnics, soldiers, and even mandarins were recorded for only five decades. Dyke in the Red River delta was continuously broken for eighteenth years. Subsequently, most part of the Tonkin

were in starvation, people fled from natural disaster, heavy taxation and corvee obligation. Demographic drain was becoming increasingly popular and hundreds of villages disappeared. The social conflict between ruling class and the peasant was unprecedented.⁶⁰ This was a society in serious fever, as described by French missionary. As a result, within five decades under the Nguyễn rule, Đại Nam increasingly became weaker and finally fallen prey to the French colonial expansion.

However, the assumption may lead to another contradictory view if one looks at the Nguyễn's engagement with neighboring countries. Large scale intervention in Cambodia and maintaining balanced competition with Siam in Laos place Huế as a key player in the Mekong valley. Reading through eventful movements, one is struck by the possible scrutiny for the query that where such power comes from, and the political philosophy behind Nguyễn's foreign policy. Three factors are put on discussion because of their interdependence, Confucianism, power and the world order of Đại Nam.

The “re-introduction” of Confucianism into Huế authority, particularly in the time of Minh Mạng is among the most significant political and social changes of the early nineteenth century Vietnam and left a huge impact on the destiny of the kingdom later on. It was defined by the process of “Confucianization” *vis-à-vis* with unprecedented territorial extent. The process involved with adoption of Chinese institutions, upholding the Chinese idea of empire and the way to rule it. Both Minh Mạng and Thieu Tri presented a strong support for revising the examination system and taking more laureates to be mandarins.⁶¹ The most significant contribution created by Confucianism in this context was a systematic Vietnam's classic culture and an orthodox generation of intellectuals deriving from the elite group. Neither the quest of development and protection the country was successful by the Nguyễn in using the ideology as their *de facto* core concept of power. Ironically, looking at Confucianism

⁶⁰Trương Hữu Quỳnh, Phan Đại Doãn, Đại cương lịch sử Việt Nam [A Summary of Vietnam History] (Hanoi: Giao Duc, 2006)

⁶¹R. B. Smith, “The Cycle of Confucianization in Vietnam”, in Walter F. Vella, ed., Aspects of Vietnamese History (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1973), p. 22; Pornpen Hatrakool, Report on a Preliminary study on the social and economic history of Vietnam during the Nguyễn Period (1802-1883), (Bangkok: Toyota Foundation, 2007)

in searching for power, the Nguyễn may chose a “wrong” way as Keith Taylor provocatively argues that the more engagement with this political idea, the weaker the Vietnamese ruler were as it widens the social, cultural and political interest between the elite and the rest majority subjects of the kingdom.⁶²

However, there were two main challenges for the Nguyễn project placed on economic and religious elements. The first came from the land system as the amount of private land overwhelmed that belonging to the commune. It took three decades for the Nguyễn to conduct land registry system through Đại Nam.* The date clearly indicated that market-oriented economy was becoming the mainstream in which, by the nineteenth century, private ownership of land was the norm, while only 20 percent of land continued to be publicly owned in Tonkin, and in the Mekong Delta, the number in 1838 was 6.41 percent.⁶³ The table bellow shows proportion of private and public land in early nineteenth century Nguyễn:

Nguyễn Dynasty distribution of private/public lands				
Region	Year	Percentage of public lands	Percentage of private lands	Percentage of other lands
Thái Bình	1805	31.43	53.24	15.33
Thừa Thiên	1815	60.87	32.10	7.03
Mekong Delta	1836	6.41	92.43	1.16

Sources: Phan Huy Lê, Nguyễn Đức Ninh, and Philippe Langlet, *Địa bạ Thái Bình*, p. 464, Nguyễn Đình Đầu, *Nghiên cứu Địa bạ triều Nguyễn: Thừa Thiên*, 112-13; idem, *Tổng kết nghiên cứu địa bạ Nam Kỳ*, p. 151

In fact, the Nguyễn significantly failed in addressing most of the economic issues of land-ownership, the peasant drain and abandoned villages, water management, trade, mining, market and handicraft. The loss of peasant and abandoned rice-field were extremely popular either in the Red River or the central

⁶² Liam C. Kelley, “Confucianism in Vietnam” (2006)

* Of these registries, 1,044 volumes with 16,884 registers are preserved in National Archives I (Hanoi) and 526 volumes with 1,635 registries at the Institute of Han Nom Studies. See Nguyễn Đình Đầu, *Tổng kết nghiên cứu Địa Ba Nam Kỳ Lục Tỉnh*, idem, *Nghiên cứu Địa bạ Triều Nguyễn*

⁶³ See Phan Huy Lê, “Research on the Vietnamese Village”, in Anthony Reid and Tuyet Nhung Tran, eds., *Vietnam Borderless History* (2006), p. 31

region.⁶⁴ And the core function of the economic and social system was to server state machine and military machine. As a state privilege, lands were first distributed to bureaucratic officials and soldiers. The practice of the Nguyễn authority in addition illuminates more for the characteristics of power relationship in Vietnamese society. The Nguyễn law, *Hoàng Việt Luật Lệ* 皇越律例 (1813) shows extremely antagonistic power relationship between state and people. By borrowing most of the Chinese Qing code which originally used to suppress the Han's resistance against outside Manchuria, Huế put its own subjects into a confrontation with state through strict social and military control. Moreover, provincial organization was largely militarized with numerous standing armies. The whole economic network mostly used for military purpose and to serve the court. Private ships were called for transport state taxes (mostly rice from the Red river and the Mekong basin) to Huế for many months annually. Skillful handicraftsmen throughout the kingdom were annually collected to Huế and other centers for state duty.⁶⁵ Since the time of Minh Mạng, the society saw the coming back to strict Confucianism after deeply engaging economic and monetary market for centuries.⁶⁶

By strengthening state control, four emperors ruled over Đại Nam in the early nineteenth century: Gia Long 嘉隆 (1802-1820), Minh Mạng 明命 (1820-1841), Thiệu Trị 紹治 (1841-1847), and Tự Đức 嗣德 (1847-1883) consistently took the Chinese model to create their own political organization. In spite of western supports receiving on the road to the throne, Huế soon came to realize that European expansionism was a potential thread for their sovereignty, including the presence of the Christian missionaries. To escape from this fear, Nguyễn Kings approached themselves closer and closer to the Confucianism tradition.⁶⁷ However, it is interesting to be aware that an intentional scenario to engage with Confucianism was prepared for decades before

⁶⁴ Yumio Sakurai, "Peasant Drain and Abandoned Villages in the Red River Delta between 1750 and 1850", in Anthony Reid, ed., *The Last Stands of Asian Autonomies* (London: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 133-152; Nguyễn Phan Quang, *Phong trào nông dân Việt Nam nửa đầu thế kỷ XIX*, pp. 25-26

⁶⁵ Nguyễn Thế Anh, *Kinh Tế, xã hội*, (1968)

⁶⁶ Hoang Anh Tuan, *Silk for Silver* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), idem, *Công ty Đông Ấn Hà Lan ở Đàng Ngoài, 1637-1700*, in *Sư tử và rồng* [Lion and Dragon], (Hanoi: The Gioi, 2008), p. 50

⁶⁷ Truong Buu Lam, *A Story of Vietnam* (Denver, Colorado: Outskirts Press, Inc, 2010), p.

Nguyễn Ánh came to full authority over the whole Vietnam. There was an extraordinary consciousness with which the first Nguyễn emperor relied upon a “Confucianism restoration” in order to solidify his power, and significantly prepared for such “restoration” during the 1790s when his war with Tây Sơn was at zenith.⁶⁸

Through those affairs, the central state surprisingly showed their mistrusted in peoples and indicated the fear of losing power into the people’s hand. Huế’s power not only was based on large number of military forces, but also on the manifestation of orthodoxy related to persecution of Christianity and people movements throughout the kingdom. Four hundred rebellions during five decades during the early Nguyễn defined a drastic change in term of power relationship resulting from breaking down local and central balance, and ethnic relationship.

The World Order of Đại Nam: Another Chinese Empire in the South?

Alexander Woodside in his standard book on early Nguyễn suggests that Sino-Vietnamese court could not use Chinese institutions without adoption the Chinese world view.⁶⁹ However, trajectory development of Đại Nam’s foreign policy is binary and fluctuant, especially to western power. Like *Sakoku* 鎖国 [Close kingdom] of the Japanese Tokugawa, Nguyễn Vietnam also involves with the controversy of whether the kingdom engaged with the outside world and what was level of this engagement. A bias assumption comes from the very western perspective that Huế was in “*bé quan tỏa cảng*” [close door, isolate port]. However what clearly comes from the source is that the Nguyễn was created dichotomic categories toward their policy with neighbours on the one hand and with the western power and their elements on the other. Shedding light on this contradiction, one can acknowledge the complex interpretation relating to template of Đại Nam regional relation.

Adoption of Sinic culture produced the imperial system for Vietnamese international relation and this network had never closed for polities in the region where Huế acted actively to engage. Confucian hierarchy or tributary system was

⁶⁸ Philippe Langlet, L’anciennce Historiographie d’ etat au Vietnam, I: Raisons d’etre, conditions d’elaboration, et caracteres au siècle des Nguyễn (Paris: EFEO, 1990), pp. 105-120

⁶⁹ Woodside, Vietnam and the Chinese Model, p. 234

employed to justify Huế's authority over numerous surrounding neighbors, as well as to deal with northern empire of China. Unlike the Qing China, Đại Nam is located among multi-kingdom political environment of the mainland and therefore, the way Vietnamese maintained their system was more competitive and flexible following the antagonism of Siam and Burmese.

Changing geopolitics along the eastern littoral reinforces new capacity for the Nguyễn's dynamic intervention as well as to connect with maritime Southeast Asia. It is clear that Huế was in the need of producing their own view for political structure in the region which they were among players. The significant of the Nguyễn's world order reflects on the appearance of "*Nhu viễn*" [accommodate the distant] section in the court chronicle. The Nguyễn reign is the first time foreign policy comes to a significant part of the royal records.⁷⁰ And it is specifically devoted for Đại Nam relationship with vassal states. The shift of concentration from the northern frontier to the western and southern frontiers is the result of more involvement along the Mekong. In the new paradigm, Southeast Asian neighbours were increasingly important for the Vietnamese than ever before because of the economic, political and security significance.

Confucianism therefore became an effective tool to produce a Đại Nam's World order and to self-legitimate Vietnamese authority over smaller principalities because it was in the same manner exercised by the universal empire of China. However, if the Qing found no challenge for their system and it was practiced with "ponderous exaggeration", the highly competitive political landscape in the Mekong valley led Huế policy to more pragmatic. One thing makes this different is that the Vietnamese has better understanding of the peoples at the frontier rather than that of Chinese. The dramatically increasing body of geographical knowledge in the early Nguyễn indicates the intentional collection of information about various lands and people. Forty-nine envoys were dispatched to neighboring country between 1802 and

⁷⁰ LTHCLC, Bang Giao Chí [Diplomatic Institution]; MMCY; Section of *Nhu viễn* [The Harmonious Management of the Distant Peoples]

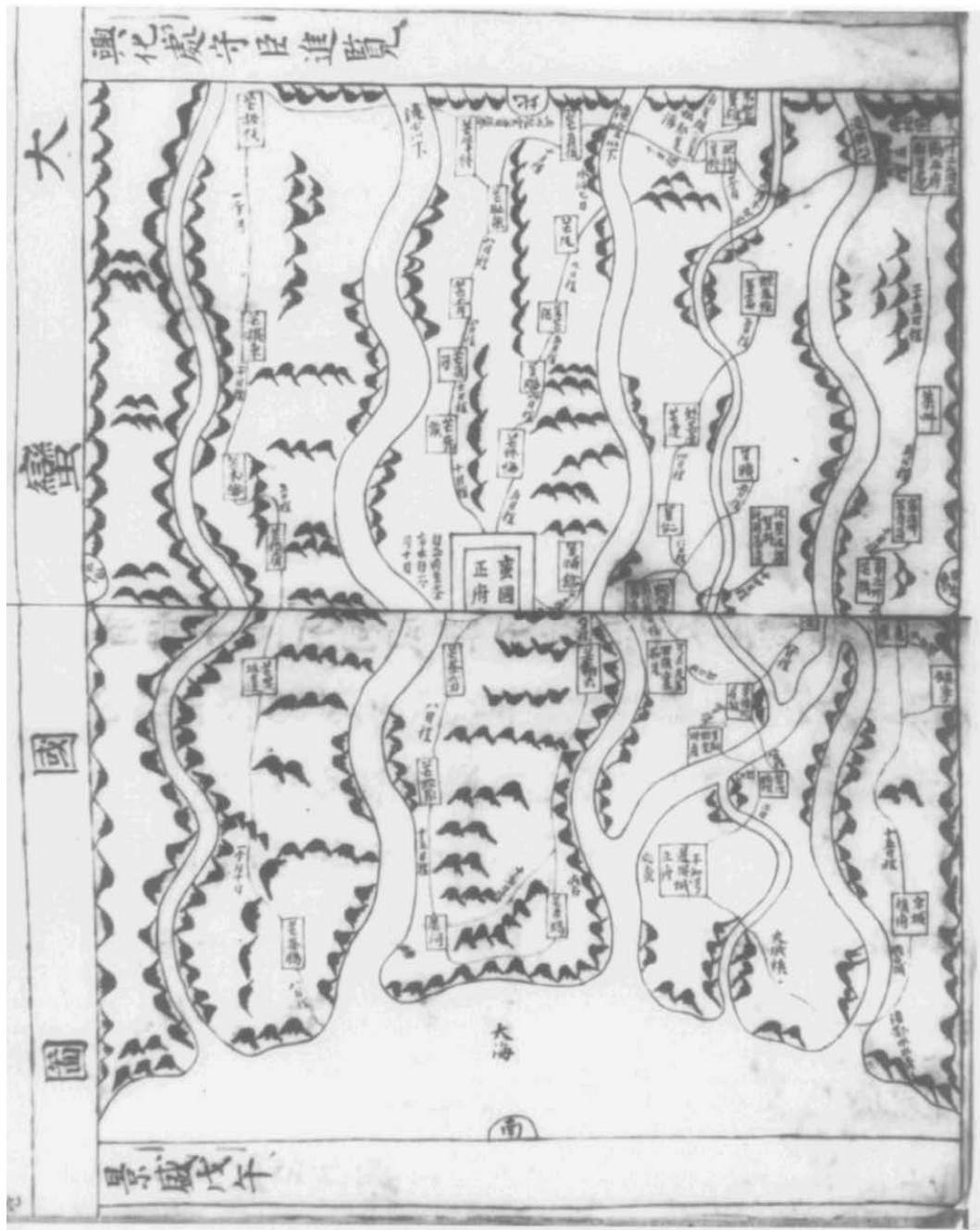
1844.⁷¹ The court report of during that time shows that Huế had a profound understanding about China and regional situation, even better than those of Chinese toward the Southeast Asian context. Ming Mang ordered his missions to record envoy's daily diary, buy Chinese books and journals. Yu Insun suggests that Vietnamese knowledge of the west much better than that of Chinese at the same time.⁷² And the transformation of western technology occurred in Đại Nam decades before the Siamese.⁷³ The Nguyễn king, Tu Duc was reported to mention on this period that “during the times of Ming Mang and Thieu Tri, [the court] often dispatched trading ships overseas in purchasing commodities and searching for information”.⁷⁴

⁷¹ See Chen Ching-ho, On the Ha Chau Missions conducted during the early period of the Nguyễn dynasty, *Journal of the Institute of Asian Studies*, Soka University, Tokyo, 11 (1990): 63-82, (in French, Chen Ching-ho, Les “missions officielles dans les Hạ châu” ou “Contrées méridionales” de la première période des Nguyễn, *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême Orient*, 1994, Volume. 81 (1), pp. 101-124; John Kleinen, Bert van der Zwan, Han Moors, and Tom van Zeeland, eds., *Sư Tử và Rồng: Bốn thế kỷ quan hệ Hà Lan-Việt Nam* [Lion and Dragon: Four centuries of Dutch-Vietnamese Relation], (Hanoi: The Gioi, 2008), p. 13

⁷² Yu Insun, *Quan hệ Việt Nam-Trung Quốc* (2009)

⁷³ Mantiene, Frédéric, "The Transfer of Western Military Technology to Vietnam in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries: The Case of the Nguyễn". *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* (Singapore: Cambridge University Press) 34, 3 (October 2003): 519–534

⁷⁴ Phan Trần Chúc, *Bùi Viên với cuộc Duy Tân Triều Tự Đức* [Bui Vien and the Reform during the Reign of Tu Duc] (Hanoi: Van hoa Thông tin, 2000), p. 10



Đại Man Quốc Đồ [Map of Great Barbarian Kingdoms, 1798]

Source: Hamilton Library, University of Hawaii at Manoa, Honolulu (microfilm collection, A. 2499)

The Vietnamese project to be a regional power can be traced back to the fifteenth century. Lê Thánh Tông's massive military campaigns toward Champa and cross the Annam Ranges built the first chapter of regional expansion. The events was extremely intriguing and had great concerns from all peoples in Southeast Asia either

from the mainland or from maritime. Using their advanced military technology of firearms, the five-year “long march” of Vietnamese to the south and the west which in the eyes of Chinese, Đại Việt was extremely troublesome: “In the seventeenth year of Chenghua (1481), Laowo (Lan Sang) [sent envoys to the Ming court] for emergency help. The Ministry of War memorialized: ‘Annam annexed Champa on the east, took Laowo on the west, dilapidated Babai (Lanna), issued a false edict to the Cheli (Sipsong Banna) Pacification Commission, killed the envoys of Melaka. [We] heard that its country will send three thousand warships to attack the Hainan [island].’”⁷⁵ In another event, Melaka’s envoy in 1481 complained to the Ming that in 1469 Đại Việt had plundered its envoys to the Ming court when they were forced by strong wind to the shore of Đại Việt. “Annam had occupied the cities of Champa and wanted to annex Melaka’s territory,” but Melaka “dared not raise troops to engage war with them.” The Ming emperor’s edict admonished Đại Việt for these actions and informed the Melakan envoys: “If Annam is again aggressive or oppresses you, you should train soldiers and horses to defend against them.”⁷⁶

However, the military movement is likely to weaken and warn rather than to conquer and destroy.⁷⁷ It does not create a sense of establishing long-lasting influence along the western frontier. Thus, the practice of the Vietnamese world order seems to stop at the foot of mountains and “un-healthy” areas. What is clearly come across the sources is that prior to the eighteenth century Vietnamese had a very weak understanding the world outside the “valley” and information did show neglectfully. There are reasons responsible for a fact that before the late eighteenth century, Vietnamese appearance in the Mekong is not consistent. Political division between the

⁷⁵ Cited in Sun Laichen, *Chinese Gunpowder Technology and Đại Việt*, in Anthony Reid and Tuyet Nhung Tran, eds., *Vietnam Borderless History* (2006), p. 105

⁷⁶ Ming shilu, 2: 820, 822, cited in Wade, “*Melaka in Ming Dynasty Texts*,” 43; for detailed information related to Le Thanh Tong military activities, see Ngô Sĩ Liên và Các sử thần triều Lê, *Đại Việt Sử ký toàn thư* [The Complete History of the Dai Viet Kingdom] (Hanoi: Nxb Văn Hóa thông tin, 2004), Thingyan, Sithu Gamani, ZimmeYazawin: *Chronicle of Chiang Mai*, Translated by Thaw Kuang and Ni Ni Myint., (Yangon: Universities Historical Research Center, 2003), Whitmore, John, *The development of Le Government in fifteenth century Vietnam*, Ph.D dissertation, (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1968), Wyatt, David and Aroonrut Wichienkeeo, *Chiang Mai Chronicle* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1995), John K. Whitmore, The Two Great Campaigns of the Hong Duc Era (1470-1497) in Đại Việt, *Southeast Asia Research* 12, 1 (2004): 119-136, Sun Laichen, *Ming-Southeast Asian Overland Interactions, c. 1368-1644*. Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2000

⁷⁷ John K. Whitmore, “*The two great campaigns*”, p. 119

15th and the 18th centuries weakened the Vietnamese who incessantly involved with regional conflict.

Then, the Viet empire project silently started again in the late seventeenth century into the lower Mekong by the Nguyễn Cochinchina. Using human flow to reclaim the vast and complex terrain and loose political management, the Vietnamese gradually fills the “blank space of power” in the southwest Indochina. Nguyễn Cư Trinh [阮居楨, 1716-1767] a prominent political and military figure of the eighteenth century Cochinchina was the chief architecture of this project. After the campaign in Chenzla (Cambodia) in 1755, he suggested that Vietnamese had no choice, but to march to the south and the best way to annex the new lands was the “tằm thực” policy [eating slowly like silkworm]. This was the gradual absorption of lower Mekong prior to the late eighteenth century.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Nguyễn Văn Hầu, Sư thôn thuộc và khai thác, p. 8

Eventful political movement in the late eighteenth century offered the Vietnamese chances to deeper their intervention into the Mekong. Gradual annexation of Hà Tiên has indispensable role to play to incorporate most part of the coastal area in the eastern side of the Thailand Gulf⁷⁹ and contours of the new empire has emerged. Both Tây Sơn and Nguyễn Ánh sought power in the Mekong basin and thus introduced new perspective of the Vietnamese image of the region.⁸⁰ Especially, by spending twenty-five years in the Gulf of Siam, Nguyễn Ánh's power was generated from the Southeast Asian network. It can be considered as a long preparation for Vietnam to strengthen its network in southwest Indochina.

Nineteenth century brought a unique perspective of Vietnamese regarding to their regional relations. The new Huế's position in dealing with China and other neighbours sometime was neglected by the fact that domestic affairs were in domination of the dynastic chronicles. It is also less attractive because of no longer war with China and disadvantages of the court troops in Cambodian protectorate were intentionally avoided by the royal historians. It is likely true, however, for the first time, the Vietnamese felt of no fear from Chinese aggression. Responses of Viet diplomatic envoys show their confidence as part of the Confucian world.⁸¹ Even, Vietnamese elite started looking down the Qing Chinese who originally came from a "barbarian space". Minh Mạng in fact once defied Chinese power after the Opium War as the great empire was defeated.⁸² In this respect, Vietnamese power orientation turned from Chinese world to Southeast Asia World. It is important to realize that Vietnamese main foreign concern was no longer at the Sino-Vietnamese border, but along the Annamese Ranges and especially to the Cambodia, and for some extent, to other Southeast Asian polities further south. This shift of power orientation had a indispensable role to play in shape the contour of the Mekong valley, the factor cannot be ignored if one would like to understand this process of political transformation in the region. Foreign historians see the process involving the imperial

⁷⁹ Hãn Nguyên, *Hà Tiên: chìa khóa nam tiến của dân tộc Việt Nam* (1970)

⁸⁰ George Dutton, *The Tây Sơn Uprising* (2006); Hickey, *Sons of Mountains* (1982), Li Tana, *Nguyễn Cochinchina* (1998), Li Tana and Nola Cooke, eds., *Water Frontier* (2006); Keith Taylor, *"Surface Orientations in Vietnam"* (1998)

⁸¹ See Lý Văn Phức, *Mân hành tạp vịnh* [Random Chants from a Journey to Mân] (1831), A. 1291, 24b–25a, cited in Liam C. Kelley, *"Confucianism in Vietnam"*, p. 317

⁸² See discussion in Yu Insun, *"Quan hệ Việt Nam-Trung Quốc"* (2009)

politics by suggesting the notion of “World Order of Đại Nam Imperialism”.⁸³ Subsequently, in 1815, Gia Long announced a list of 13 countries considered as vassals (*viễn phương chư quốc lai cống*) of Vietnam. “This list included Luang Prabang, Vientiane, Burma, France, England, Trấn Ninh (eastern Laos), Thủy xá (Water Haven), Hỏa xá (Fire Haven)”.⁸⁴

⁸³ David Chandler, “An Anti-Vietnamese Rebellion in Early Nineteenth Century Cambodia: Pre-Colonial Imperialism and a Pre-Nationalist Response”, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Mar., 1975), pp. 16-24; Tsuboi, Yoshiharu, *L' Empire Vietnamien Face a la France et a la Chine* [The Vietnamese Empire in the Face of France and China], (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1987)

⁸⁴ Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, p. 237

CHAPTER III

EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY VIETNAM

THE POLITICS OF SPACE

In this chapter, the examination deals with Vietnamese power paradigm between the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The case of Vietnam will help to build up an applicable model of political transformation in the mainland and therefore, it is suggested that early nineteenth century Vietnamese political ideology was significantly in transformation following the reorganization of space and reconstruction of geopolitics in the eastern mainland. By doing so, I suggest an alternative interpretation of the early nineteenth century Vietnamese political structure through the framework of political space. I argue that the establishment of the Nguyễn dynasty marked the significant change in the Vietnamese history in shaping its contour of modern “geobody”. New dynasty reunified a country stretching over more than two thousand kilometers from the Red River delta to the Lower Mekong delta, and therefore necessitated the building of a new effective internal administrative system. The quest of administration over the vast territory allowed the Nguyễn to come up with a new idea of power structure and political philosophy: the practice of power over geopolitical surface. To do so, the centralized state uses power of geography and cartography to recognize, conquer, and rebuild space as part of its state-making project. Such process of spatial reconstruction not only involves with connecting different spaces of Vietnamese speakers but also territorializing periphery and semi-periphery into state domain.

In fact, the creation of present-day Vietnam is a production of at least several historical processes in which political, ethnic, and spatial interaction between the Viet and others has variously waxed and waned during the last thousand years. Therefore, the making of Vietnam as a geopolitical entity is controversially read in many

different ways as a focal point of competing historical narrative, the idea of “Vietnam” in time and space.

Theoretically speaking, each historiography tries to draw the connection between time and space. However, usually space is treated as the dead, fixed, the undialectical, and the immobile, while in contrast; time is richness, fecundity, life, and dialectic.¹ In fact, border or frontier is political constructs, imagined projections of territorial power which are historically different. The way they appear on maps deceptively affects on state, politicians, and even historians. Within his framework, this chapter looks at the transformation of space in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Vietnam. The departure point is to rethink geopolitical space as a contingent device, not as a fixed category, even within national boundary. Those modern borders are politically products of human imagination during the last two hundred years, and nineteenth century Vietnam witnessed one of the first steps of this transition under the process of “early state making”.

Vietnamese nationalist historiography tried to monopolize the discourse of national space by creating its own version of two thousand year-national building. “Nation” as a manifest entity is believed to set up from the time of Hung Kings whose authentic existence is greatly maintained in question.² By freezing time and space, imperial, national and Marxist scholars produce a single voice and a repeated version for one of the most phenomenal changing geopolitics in the eastern side of the mainland Southeast Asia. A group of people, the Viet, had made an extraordinary journey of thousand kilometers, tripled their geographical distribution and overcame various ethnic groups, civilizations and principalities. Despite the fact that process of territorial expansion experienced in different forms of annexation and military campaign, national narratives simplifies as cultural exchange (*giao lưu văn hóa*) and

¹ Sachchidanand Sahai, *The Mekong River: Space and Social Theory* (New Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 2005), p. 8

² See *Hùng Vương dựng nước* [King Hung establishes the Country], 4 vols, (Hanoi: Nxb Khoa học xã hội, 1970-1974), Liam C. Kelley, The Biography of the Hồng Bàng Clan as a Medieval Vietnamese Invented Tradition, *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Summer 2012), pp. 87-130; Keith Taylor, Comments on “The Biography of the Hồng Bàng Clan as a Medieval Vietnamese Invented Tradition” by Liam Kelly, *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Summer 2012), pp. 131-138

maintained silent upon territorial annexation.³ In addition, despite the fact that there are different layers of space and political categories in between the Viet domain and other groups at the frontiers, national scholars see the modern national boundary as a natural phenomenon which had been presented for thousands of years.⁴ Thus, peripheries and margins become part of national historiography without any question. This imperial geography interprets space of ethnic majority as national space and therefore leaves no room for any identification of local, margin and other minorities. State manipulates the idea of space and standardizes its structure by setting a single category of political status under the direct center control. In this perspective, geobody of modern Vietnam has been shaped *vis-à-vis* the consciousness and establishment of “Vietnam nation” (dan toc Viet Nam) from the ancient time. Meanwhile, history of geopolitics is somehow significantly neglected by Vietnamese scholarship, not because its meaning is less important, rather than the sensitive discussion it involves, relating to the production of modern body of state through territorial, ethnic and cultural interaction. It is a reflection of “*a complicated relationship between Đại Việt and kingdoms in center and southern Vietnam*”.⁵ To a larger extent, these discussions of inter-ethnic tensions or Vietnamese assimilation of other groups are considered sensitive and therefore to be better avoided.⁶

Historically speaking, view of border and space always comes from center which seems to ignore different spatial layers lying in between center and periphery. Moreover, state does not simply impose the various spaces on a local level, but try to

³ See Lương Ninh, Vương Quốc Champa (Hanoi: Đại Học Quốc Gia, 2009), Bruce M. Lockhart, “Competing Narratives of the Nam Tiến” (MS).

⁴ Đào Duy Anh, Đất nước Việt Nam Qua Các đời (Hanoi: Văn Hóa Thông Tin, 2010)

⁵ Phan Huy Lê, “Bài Phát biểu tổng kết hội thảo khoa học “Văn hóa Óc Eo và Vương quốc Phù Nam” [Closing Remark of the Conference on “Oc Eo Culture and Funan Kingdom], in Văn hóa Óc Eo & Vương quốc Phù Nam [Oc Eo Culture and Funan Kingdom], ed. Hội khoa học Lịch sử Việt Nam (Hanoi: The Gioi, 2006), p. 306

⁶ Bruce Lockhart, “Competing Narratives of the Nam Tiến”, (MS); for new changes of Vietnamese scholarship on Nam Tiến, see Proceedings of three recent Conferences on Funan, Nguyễn Dynasty and Southern Vietnam, namely, Hội khoa học lịch sử Việt Nam, ed., Văn hóa Óc Eo & Nước Phù Nam [Oc Eo Culture and Funan Kingdom], (Hanoi: Thegioi, 2006), Ủy ban nhân dân tỉnh Thanh Hóa and Hội Khoa Học Lịch sử Việt Nam, eds., Kỷ yếu hội thảo khoa học Chúa Nguyễn và Vương triều Nguyễn trong lịch sử Việt Nam từ thế kỷ XVI đến thế kỷ XIX [Proceedings of the Conference in the Nguyễn Lords and the Nguyễn Dynasty in Vietnamese History from the 16th to the 19th Centuries], (Hanoi: Thegioi, 2008), Hội Khoa học Lịch sử Việt Nam, ed., Một số vấn đề lịch sử vùng đất Nam Bộ đến cuối thế kỷ XIX [Some Issues in the History of the Mekong River Delta through the end of the 19th century], (Hanoi: Thegioi, 2009)

simplify space as homogenous as possible for the purpose of management.⁷ Records from state view are indeed the main challenge for historians to read space differently in a decentralized way. Destructive national historiography challenges the view by highlighting regional identity and placing more attentions to remedy Vietnam's past from this disparity. In doing so, scholars are in the need of rethinking space as a departure point to reconstruct structure of Vietnam's history via different layers of regional relationship. Southern Vietnam is first visibly recognized as a distinct entity which does not fall in the same theme of "united national space" historically. Alexander Woodside was among the first called for this regional recognition.⁸ Li Tana illuminates the view by acknowledging the differentiation between the northern and southern space as different ways to be Vietnamese.⁹ But there are probably more than two ways of acting as Vietnamese. Keith Taylor fundamentally reconstructs paradigm of space in Vietnam by moving beyond the theme of national historiography. He questions the main discourse of "territorial expansion", the Southward movement (Nam Tiến):

"The category of "nam tiến", "the march to the south," has been established in modern Vietnamese historiography to cover an imagined event extending across many generations and hundreds of kilometers and commonly essentialized as something inherent in a presumed Vietnamese character, a process that has operated throughout Vietnamese history. I do not believe that such an event ever took place and I will speak no further of it. Instead, I will speak of specific episodes at different times and places that have no apparent relation to one another as part of a single historical process of movement from north to south; I will speak about different ways of acting Vietnamese in different times and places without a logic of connecting them as one event".¹⁰

⁷ James C. Scott, Seeing like a State: How certain schemes to improve human condition have failed (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998)

⁸ Alexander Woodside, Vietnam and Chinese Model, p. 281

⁹ Li Tana, Nguyễn Cochinchina (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1998); Victor Lieberman, Strange Parallels, Vol. 1 (Cambridge University Press, 2003)

¹⁰ Keith Taylor, Surface Orientations in Vietnam: Beyond Histories of Nation and Region, Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. 57, No. 4 (Nov., 1998), p. 951

Recognizing Viet space not as homogeneity, Taylor breaks it out into six different isolated episodes. The interpretation has a strong implication during the last decade to rewrite precolonial Vietnam history as a result of “rescuing history from the nation”. However, it is likely that scholars have brought ‘space’ of Viet history from one extreme to another by inflexibly isolating the eastern mainland into several unconnected zones. Victor Lieberman recently describes Vietnam and the eastern mainland as “the least coherent territory in the world”.¹¹

Despite the fact that regionalism is directly resulted from the Nam Tién, it is possible to think of an alternative discourse in which the development of those regional histories was not completely isolated, rather than a sharing social space among people who speak the same language and practice the same culture more or less.¹² Nature of the seventeenth to nineteenth century eastern mainland is the surface of fluid human experience in time and terrain. Flow of people, connection of power network, and ethnic integration were increasingly integrated in an incomparable scale. The phenomenon allows relocating view of space in Vietnam history through examining structure of its geopolitics. In spite of recognizing the existence of “Nam Tién”, this chapter uses Taylor’s regionalism theory as departure point to look at eastern mainland as a whole. The area is possibly considered as a space of transformation in which different spaces are reconstructed and reorganized into a single centralized political entity under the Nguyễn rule. By separating Viet history into different unconnected scenes, Taylor’s view is not likely very successful to understand process in which various categories have come to be constituted through connecting spaces and to unfold factors involving the creation of new geopolitics. It is hard to mark such clear frontier among different Viet groups who originally departure from the Red River delta, who share the same language, culture, economic nature, political ideology, and the sense of “ethnic” belonging. It is also likely that the differentiation between the north and the south have been exaggerated, and as a result, a larger spatial integration has been neglected by which in 1802, a single political entity emerged.

¹¹ Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*, vol 1, p. 338

¹² Liam C. Kelley, "Confucianism" in Vietnam: A State of the Field Essay, *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1-2 (February/August 2006), pp. 314-370

There were links connecting all those Vietnamese of different places to maintain their course of history going to a common theme that is to annex all pieces of space of Vietnamese. The shift of territory, people, economy and power shares a dialectic relationship. Moreover, all the regional powers looked at China for substantial security and power. This reflects a clear north-south surface orientation among the Viet. However, as the paper discusses below, the Viet faced confuse to differentiate themselves over space. Regional interaction therefore was also more complicated than what Taylor describes as one group, the Nguyễn family, was found as *de facto* main character of the six episodes and engaged with at least three regions of Thanh Nghệ, Thuận Quảng, and the Lower Mekong. Thus, there is a consideration what reconstruction of space in Vietnamese history not only acknowledges the existence of spatial fragments, but also recognizes categories help to connect and create a new structure of space in early nineteenth century. In doing so, I will put them all in a single historical context and analyses the moving of power and changing structure of those zones within the landscape of the eastern mainland. In this perspective, instead of viewing Vietnam as a fixed geographical area and appropriating nation state as a natural category, I will follow the movement of people and power to reconstruct the way they shaped a new paradigm of geopolitics. Each historical “episode” thus will not be found isolated but part of the larger political and social network which has critical impact on others. Building a sense of social and political space over the eastern mainland is a fundamental way to revise history of this region over the last three hundred year perspective. It can be useful in many ways to unfold the spatial structure of Vietnamese history which provides a space for the emergence of modern Vietnam starting from the early nineteenth century. Then, state making began a new project to create a homogeneous version of space and erase any sense of regional difference. Therefore, it is significant to trace back geopolitical landscape of Vietnam to this particular time to shed some light on the relation between space and socio-political theory, particularly the dialectic relation between space and political structure of early nineteenth century Vietnam, the time of transformation. State, with new consciousness of surface orientation, used power of geography to recognize and reorganize space. The transformation involves with shifting category of “heartland”, “borderland”, and “periphery”. Within this process, I

suggest that space can be strategically read and conceptualized differently. The idea of Vietnam as a geographical term originally presents an imagined space inhabited by the Viet ethnic. Culturally speaking, it was generally viewed as a “civilizational space” which surrounding by “barbarians” and “savages” (man, mọi, thổ) who setting outside frontier of the Viet language, Sino-Vietnamese script, Confucianism, Buddhism, agriculture, and state organization. Such ethno-centric view and its legacies have been produced and passed through thousands of years, now in the need of revising. In doing so, the better way is not to break modern Vietnam into isolated “zone of history”, but to put different “zones” together and draw their connection and interrelationship in time and space.

3. 1. Space of Political Fragmentation in the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries

As mentioned above, two century *Nam Tiến* is fundamentally associated with changes through the clash of political space in the eastern mainland. Victor Lieberman characterizes the process as “*administrative cycle*” by pointing out that from Lê Lợi to Gia Long, each inaugurated or markedly accelerated a phrase of centralization and recourse concentration that contracted sharply with conditions at the end of the previous regime.¹³ The economic policies in the early Le dynasty in general and land policy in particular significantly contribute to create decentralized spaces in the next century. Some huge amounts of lands (up to 2000 mẫu) were given to the high-ranking officers or members of the royal family as “*lộc điền*” (gift land). Those receivers soon became *de factor* local economic and political powers as long as the central government was unable to maintain its control. Thus, in the long term, rising regional rulers were the most serious threat to Lê Thánh Tông’s political legacy.¹⁴ Political turmoil between the 16th to the 18th centuries is directly resulted from regional confrontation which expanding from the Red river to the Mekong river during this period of time.

¹³ Victor Lieberman, *Burmese Administrative Cycles: Anarchy and Conquest, c. 1580-1760* (Princeton, N. J: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 4

¹⁴ Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*, vol. 1, p. 396

Although national historiography in any way denies such version of unhomogeneity and ununity, this part of the thesis discusses the shift of political consolidation between Lê Thánh Tông and Gia Long and suggests a space of fragmentation in which local powers dominated the theme of history and created an extraordinary period of spatial expansion ever seen. Many illuminate that “Nam Tiến” framework was destiny and the political fragmentation only temporary.¹⁵ However, if one relocates the angle of vision and looks at those two animated centuries as a whole, the idea of acting Vietnamese was variously extended in a large scale never seen before. Also, in this vast territory it is witnessed the complex internal and external interactions that none of the Vietnamese has experienced before. It is worth to note that the impact of this political discourse was undoubtedly fundamental, took part in changing the course of Vietnamese history, and left its mark on hearts and minds of Vietnamese for generations.

The existence of various political domains in the area which present-day becomes Vietnamese territory shows impact of regionalism on reconfiguring new terrain of power. The Mạc family in Cao Bằng, Trịnh Lords in Tongkin, Nguyễn Lords in Cochinchina, and the Mạc family of Hà Tiên, and the Tây Sơn, were *de facto* political entities although shadow of a Lê King was sometimes employed just to justify and legitimate local rulers’ actions. Tran Trong Kim described the period as one in which the Trinh and Nguyễn each “stole a direction . . . From then on, the mountains and the rivers were separated, South and North divided that was a distinct period in the history of [the] country.”¹⁶ In the South, Nguyễn Lord Phúc Chu claimed himself as *Đại Việt Quốc Vương* [大越國王 King of the Daiviet Kingdom], and described his polity of Cochinchina, “the Đại Việt kingdom is a tiny place surrounded by mountains and sea, reclaiming the mountains, driving wild animals to settle, and ruling for 13 generations”.¹⁷ The Nguyễn ruler also requested the Qing China for

¹⁵ Tran and Anthony Reid, eds., *Vietnam Borderless History*, (2006), p. 13

¹⁶ Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt Nam sử lược*, 1920. Reprint, (Ho Chí Minh City: Van Hoa Thong Tin, 1999), p. 293

¹⁷ Thích Đại Sán, *Hải Ngoại Ký Sự*, [An Overseas Record] (hereafter HNKS), (Viện Đại Học Huế, 1963), pp. 9-10

recognition as a vassal state.¹⁸ On the other hand, the Trinh Lords, after seventh campaigns continuously tried to annex the south, implicitly acknowledged Cochinchina's autonomy in a *de facto* détente in 1673, and seven decades later Lord Nguyễn Phúc Khoát formalized the country's independence with his self-coronation as king in 1744. By this time, army of the Nguyễn Cochinchina had expanded Vietnamese domination to the Gulf of Thailand - at the expense of Cham, Cambodian and other historical occupants-laying the territorial foundations for the future nation state.¹⁹

The extension of space, changing human landscape, and different social integrations had created “different categories of Vietnamese” who own different ways of acting Vietnamese in different places.²⁰ The distinction among Vietnamese was becoming regionally popular. There is a saying among Vietnamese-speaking people in the southern Central Region to mark regional identity among those four provinces along the central coasts, “Quảng Nam hay cãi, Quảng Ngãi hay lo, Bình Định hay co, Thừa Thiên ních hết” [Quang Nam knows how to argue, Quang Ngai knows how to worry, Binh Dinh knows how to fight, Thua Thien gobbles everything up].²¹ In some cases, the Vietnamese seem to limit their view within a certain space which was thought that they belong to. In his extraordinary book of the Inner Region's *Phủ Biên Tạp Lục* 撫邊雜錄 [Miscellaneous chronicles of the pacified frontier], Lê Quý Đôn 黎貴惇 viewed *Đàng Trong* [Inner Region/ Cochinchina] as “biên” 邊 or frontier. Another eighteenth century scholar, Ngô Thì Sĩ, in his preface of this book, also points out, “Thuận Quảng is the southern frontier of the state. In the early time of *Trung Hưng* Period, Nguyễn family is relative, was appointed to govern those regions. Through several generations, however, the statue of tributary was gradually broken. [The region] from La River to the south turned into another territory. For two

¹⁸ Ibid, pp. 103-04

¹⁹ Charles Wheeler, The Case of Boats in Vietnamese History: Ships and Social Flows that Shaped Nguyễn Cochinchina (Central Vietnam), 16th-18th Centuries, Unpublished Manuscript, p. 9

²⁰ Translated by Keith Taylor, Surface Orientation, pp. 949, 951, Taylor has a unique research and suggestion to illuminate discuss of how regionalism plays as a driven force in Vietnamese history although he seems to go quite far in implying that there is no notion of Nam Tiến rather than the existence of different episodes at different times and places that have no apparent relation to one another.

²¹ Translated by Keith W. Taylor, see Surface Orientations in Vietnam, (1998), p. 950-51

hundred years, the area of Bo Chinh was divided into two parts where a small reed was become the frontier. Then what happened in the south is almost unknown.”²² Diplomatic relation among those political domains of the eighteenth century Vietnam drew a clear fragmentary political space. Here are famous examples. The Tây Sơn and Lê-Trịnh government exchanged words as two state and called each other as “quý quốc” [Good neighboring state].²³ In Nguyễn Huệ’s view, *Bắc Hà* 北河 [Tonkin] is characterized as a “strong kingdom” having four hundred year-history. And if he took opportunity to capture it, people would pose the question of “what is the legitimacy of the action?”²⁴

The case of Nguyễn Hữu Chinh [阮有整, ?-1787], one of the remarkable historical figures in the late eighteenth century Vietnam, shows an interesting example for this transitional time as intellectuals tied themselves into knots of internal conflict among various spaces, powers, and interpretation of legitimacy. Chinh who was born in Nghệ An and, in the first chapter of his life, sang the same song with the northern scholarship. The year 1782 is found as a watershed of his career when Chinh had connections with Tây Sơn 西山 and then played as a *de facto* key advisor for Nguyễn Huệ’s northward plan.²⁵ Under the Chinh’s advice, in 1786, Tây Sơn moved northward, overthrew Trịnh Lord and he himself engaged with this campaign as a significant military leader. Contemporary northern scholars considered those actions as betrayal or “*cõng rắn cắn gà nhà*” [inviting snake to bite home chicken].²⁶ The interesting thing is that, the phrase is again used by later national scholarship to criticize either Lê Chiêu Thống for asking help from Qing China, nor Nguyễn Ánh for seeking military aids from Siam and French. Ironically, among various political spaces of the eighteenth century Vietnam, there is no space for Chinh who had a

²² PBT, p. 347, also see Dương Văn An, *Ô Châu Cận Lục* [Record on the O Prefecture], [Hanoi: Giao Duc, 2009], “The Vietnamese Southern Frontier”, in Li Tana and Anthony Reid, eds., *Southern Vietnam under the Nguyễn*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore/ECHOSEA, Australian National University, 1993), pp. 1-5,

²³ Tạ Chí Đại Trường, *Lịch sử nội chiến*, p. 349

²⁴ *Lịch Triều Tạp Ký* (Hereafter: LTTK), p. 553

²⁵ Ibid, pp. 553-556, Cao Xuân Dục et al, *Quốc Triều Chính Biên Toát Yếu* [Summary of the primary compilation of the present dynasty], (Huế: Nxb Thuận Hóa, 1998), p. 16

²⁶ LTTK, p. 556, Tạ Chí Đại Trường, *Lịch sử cuộc nội chiến*, p. 350

“serious mistake” of attempt going through those political spaces and frontiers. In spite of having power, Chinh was discriminated and isolated by the northern intellectuals until was killed by Tây Sơn. The notion of *sĩ phu Bắc Hà* 士夫北河 [the Northern Intellectuals] in this political situation is greatly significant. They distinguished themselves as the origin and the source of the Vietnamese-speakers’ culture and civilization who tend to look down, more or less, those living out of frontier [the Inner Region]. “Nguyễn family rules a region, used to open only *huong* examination [local exam for selecting officers]... Literature is not in favor. Intellectuals are rarely appointed.”²⁷

In short, the Vietnamese politics between the 15th and the 18th centuries possibly embodied both cyclic and linear trends. It shows up one of the main political characteristic of the mainland Southeast Asia which is pointed out by Victor Lieberman, the pattern of accelerating integration punctuated by recurrent collapse. As a result, a new image of Vietnamese political model was gradually introduced by the establishing of the Nguyễn Dynasty in 1802. More than three hundred years since the reign of Lê Thánh Tông [黎聖宗 1460-1497], Nguyễn’s political institution marked the coming back of an absolute mechanism in which, it modified a highly-centralized state machinery, a number of critical structures to improve the level of provincial integration, the mobilizing capacity, the cultural authority of Confucianism of the state beyond restored the Lê dynasty levels. Further, among others, the territorial expansion during the early days of the Nguyễn Dynasty is crucial for shaping the pattern of Vietnamese historical development on the edge of modernity. On the basic Vietnamese chronicles, edicts, and local records, it is possible to suggest about a territorial integration and a shaping of idea of nation state during the first three reigns of the Nguyễn. By and large only the new expanding territory, the southern Vietnam [*Nam Bộ*] has been attracted scholarly attention to date. And this neglecting creates a gap to fully understand how the new ruler of Vietnamese reunified kingdom extended political authority, not only the southern part, but over cores and peripheries in the whole country.

²⁷ PBTL, p. 242

3. 2. Nam Tiến: Moving South and the Reconstruction of the Viet's Space

“There is no way to the west, and it is too hard to go the north, therefore, we should do our best to advance to the south”.²⁸

Nguyễn Cư Trinh 阮居楨, c. 1760s

Multiethnicity Space

In this part, I will examine the impact of spatial expansion on social, economic and political change along the eastern mainland. Traditional scholarship on Vietnam merely interprets “Nam Tiến” as territorial and cultural incorporation. The significance of the process however is possibly well far beyond regarding to large scale movement of peoples, changing human landscape, demographic terrain, and power paradigm between the Red River delta and the Lower Mekong basin.²⁹ Among those, the introduction of new social and political space is found extremely important in taking shape of the early nineteenth century society. For a certain extent, the discourse not only contributes to create geographical distribution, but also to change the Vietnamese political philosophy as a pre-modern national state by transforming ideology of territorialization of space from *Đại Việt* [大越 Great Viet] to *Đại Nam* [大南 Great South], from entity of “ethnic” orientation to the one of geopolitical orientation.³⁰ A clear distinction between those two notions suggests the place of

²⁸ Nguyễn Cư Trinh, *Sãi Vãi* [A dialogue between a monk and a nun], quoted from Nguyễn Đăng Thục, “Hai trào lưu di dân Nam Tiến” [Two waves of the Vietnamese Southward Expansion], *Việt Nam Khảo Cổ Tập San* [Vietnamese Archaeology Review], 6 (1970): 170

²⁹ Phan Khoang, *Việt Sử Xứ Đàng Trong*, [History of Vietnamese in the Inner Region], (Sài Gòn: Khai Trí: 1970), Keith W. Taylor, “Nguyễn Hoàng and the Beginning of Vietnam’s Southward Expansion”, in *Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Era*, ed. Anthony Reid (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 42-65, Lockhart, Bruce M. “Colonial and Post-colonial Constructions of ‘Champa’”, Paper presented at the NUS–UNSW workshop “Ways of Seeing,” Sydney, January 2000; Michael G. Cotter, Towards a Social History of the Vietnamese Southward Movement, *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Mar., 1968), pp. 12-24, Li Tana, *Nguyễn Cochinchina, Southern Vietnam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, (Ithaca: N. Y: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 19, 21, 28, Keith W. Taylor, Surface Orientation in Vietnam: Beyond Histories of Nation and Region, *Journal of Asian Studies*, 1998, vol. 57.4, pp. 951, 960, Nguyễn Đình Đầu, “The Vietnamese Southward Expansion, as Viewed Through the Histories”, in Andrew Hardy, Mauro Cucarzi and Patrizia Zolese, eds., *Champa and the Archaeology of My Son (Vietnam)* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009), pp. 61-77, Bruce Lockhart, “Competing Narratives of the Nam Tiến”, Unpublished manuscript.

³⁰ In this thesis, the term “Viet” refers to the Ethnicity of Viet or Kinh.

conceptualizing space based on ethnicity to the space of geopolitics. Tracing back motors of these changes, the suggestion is that the eastern mainland can be strategically seen as in the first step of state formation in term of reorganizing geopolitics.

Despite increasing doubt concerning to the idea of “Viet” 越 as a single and purely ethnicity, the view has been generated for thousand years and become *de facto* core of belief and identity. Those people originally centered in the Red River delta where a model of structurally intensive plain-kingdom.³¹ From this perspective, the Viet maintained a very flexible relationship with highland tribes and groups at the frontier. Traditional Vietnamese between the eleventh and the fourteenth centuries employed the notion of *Jimi* 羈縻 [loose reins] to reflect this political engagement. Such kind of political entity was put on a unique context of frequent outside invasion from both the north and the South, at least seven times from the north³² and roughly fifty times of military confrontation with the south between 938 and 1497.³³ The context gives a proper explanation for the Viet political philosophy of “ethnic” orientation. As a small group of people who had frequently challenged by another purely ethnic civilization and power, the Hán 漢, the Viet 越 would naturally develop the idea of differentiating between them and those others ethnicities, building their own kingdom of great Viet and showing their own distinct identity:

“Our state of Daiviet is indeed a country where culture and institutions have flourished. Our mountains and river have their characteristic features, but our habits and customs are not the same from north to south. Since the Formation of our nation by the Trieu, Dinh, Ly, and Tran, our rulers have governed their empire exactly in the manner in

³¹ Sakurai Yumio, *Land, Water, Rice and Men in Early Vietnam*, ed., by Keith. W. Taylor, Published privately by Professor K.W. Taylor (Cornell University)

³² In the years of 981, 1075-77, the 1250s, the 1280s, 1406-27, see Ngô Sĩ Liên và các sử thần triều Lê, *Đại Việt sử Ký Toàn Thư*, (hereafter DVSKTT) (Hanoi: Văn Hóa Thông Tin, 2004)

³³ In the years of 979, 982, 997, 1020, 1043, 1044, 1068, 1069, 1074-1075, 1103, 1104, 1132, 1166, 1167, 1177, 1216, 1218, 1251, 1311-12, 1318, 1326, 1329, 1353, 1361, 1362, 1365, 1366, 1367, 1368, 1371, 1346, 1376-77, 1378, 1380, 1381, 1382, 1383, 1389, 1390, 1391, 1396, 1400, 1402, 1434, 1444, 1445, 1446, 1469, 1470-71, DVSKTT

which the Han, T'ang, Sung, and Yuan did theirs. Although we have been at times strong, at time weak. We have at no time lacked heroes."³⁴

(Nguyễn Trãi 阮廌, *Bình Ngô Đại Cáo* 平吳大誥, 1428)

Structure of Vietnamese history between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries now opens to a different discourse. This chapter is not trying to argue that the Viet in the seventeenth or eighteenth century was less unified than their ancestors of the previous centuries to against external invaders although Li Tana, Keith W. Taylor, Nola Cooke, and Victor Lieberman have strongly showed elsewhere the notion of regionalism and how it impacts on shaping Vietnamese history in the pre-modern period. In fact, pre-modern Vietnamese from all those regions maintained the awareness of the differentiation between the Chinese North and the Viet South through a “cultural frontier”.³⁵ For this reason, Nguyễn Huệ 阮惠, a general came from the southern of Central Region, had claimed the legitimacy of the northern campaign, “*Fight to keep our long hair, fight to keep our black teeth, fight until the enemy having no an intact coach to flee back, fight until the enemy having no an intact piece of armor, fight to demonstrate that the heroic South kingdom has its owner historically*”.³⁶

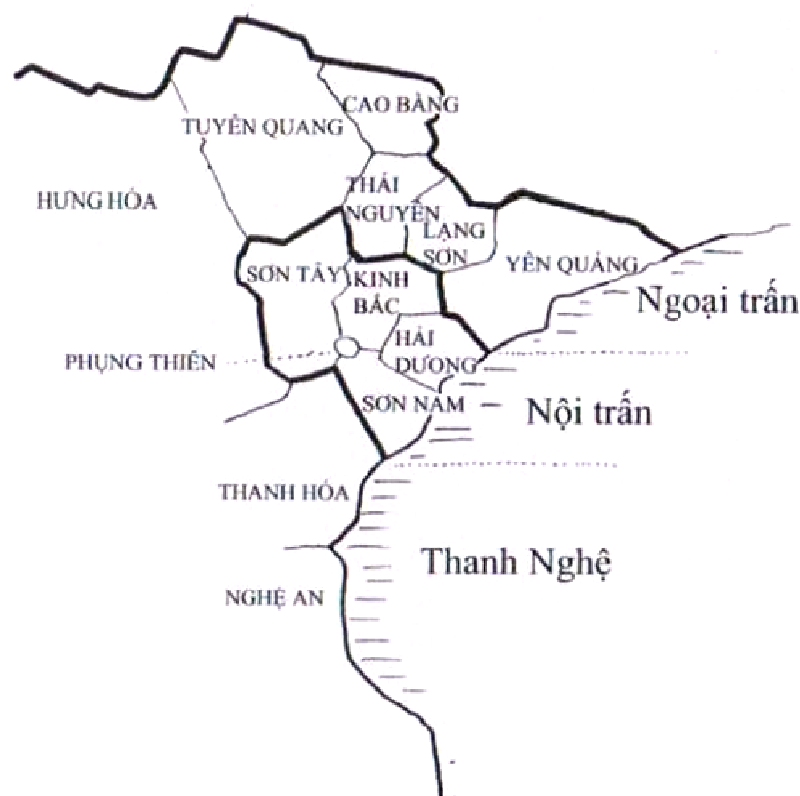
This kind of north-south axis of political and cultural consciousness frames the production of Vietnamese knowledge and criteria to value their society. The employment of Chinese culture plays a critical role in marking a cultural frontier between Viet space and non-Viet space. Prior to the late eighteenth century, what comes across clearly from the sources is that peoples living in the mountain and complex terrain are not the Viet’s concern. In their perspective those do not practice Vietnamese culture, Confucianism, Chinese writing... are *man, mội, thỏ* [蠻土人種 barbarians, savages] and in any way are not considered as subjects of the Đại Việt

³⁴ Trương Bửu Lâm, Patterns of Vietnamese response to foreign intervention, 1858-1900 (New Haven: Southeast Asia Studies, Yale University, 1967), p. 55, also see Stephen O' Harrow, Nguyễn Trãi' s "Bình Ngô Đại Cáo" of 1428: The Development of a Vietnamese National Identity, Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Mar., 1979), pp. 159-174

³⁵ Liam C. Kelley, Beyond the Bronze Pillars: Envoy Poetry and the Sino-Vietnamese Relationship (Honolulu: Association for Asian Studies, University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), pp. 1-3

³⁶ Thomas Hodgkin, Vietnam: the Revolutionary Path, (London : Macmillan, 1981), p. 89

kingdom. The minority can be recognized as tributary or vassal state for Thăng Long/Hanoi, but they definitely are outsiders. The map below shows different layers of space during the seventeenth and eighteenth century Đại Việt in which the central area were under direct Thăng Long control. Not far from the capital city, however, the upland areas resided of various ethnic peoples where the Viet had no effective authority. The region is described as space of “unhealthy air of the mountain” [*lam chướng*] where there was no Viet official wanted to work or stay permanently.³⁷ Therefore, the disction of Viet and non-Viet ethnically and culturally leads to paradigm of political recognition by which the Viet domain and the others is clearly separated.



Map of Northern Vietnam (17th and 18th centuries) [Emmanuel Poisson, 2009: 13]

³⁷ Emmanuel Poisson, Unhealthy air of the mountains: Kinh and ethnic minority rule on the Sino-Vietnamese frontiers from the fifteenth to the twentieth century, in On the Borders of State Power: Frontiers in the Greater Mekong Sub-region, ed., by martin Gainsborough (Oxon: Routledge, 2009), p. 12

Consequences of Nam Tiến, however challenges this traditional relationship by opening Viet space for the others. It widens the Vietnamese perspective of space by engaging with new ethnicity, culture, and religion along the way moving south. The movement put Vietnamese in the convergence of an alternative space through their interaction with various groups, and by which, they experienced a process of collective and negotiating identity.* The Viet had passed through the Champa kingdom and the heritage of Funan in the Lower Mekong delta, and had a great political, economic, cultural and ethnic integration with various peoples, including Chinese, Cham, Khmer, Malay, and Westerner.

Taking the interaction between the Viet and the Chinese for instance, in the past both looked at each other through the Bronze Pillars [*đồng trụ*] or *Ái Nam Quan*, however, there was only one Chinese invasion over 374 years between 1428 and 1802. At the same time, the Viet enjoyed their cooperation with Chinese in the Lower Mekong Delta for trade, cultural exchange, military ally, and territorial expansion.³⁸ Such kind of multiethnicity and fluid population in Huế, Thanh Hà, Hội An, Mỹ Tho, Sài Gòn, Biên Hòa, Hà Tiên changed the discourse of the Vietnamese history through the ethnic, economic, cultural elements which different from what had seen inside their previous political domain.³⁹ The plurality of human landscape had a great impact

* To see how the Viet' deities sought position at a formal Champa shrine, for instance, Nguyễn Thế Anh, "The Vietnamization of the Cham Deity Pô Nagar." *Essays into Vietnamese Pasts*, eds., K.W. Taylor & John K. Whitmore (N. Y: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 42-50. For the Viet' interaction with local Khmer, Cham in the southernmost Vietnam, see Nguyễn Đình Đầu, *Lưu Dân Việt với vùng đất Cà Mau-Hà Tiên-Núi Linh Quỳnh* [Vietnamese Immigrants in the areas of Camau-Hatien-Linh Quynh Mountain], *Xưa và Nay*, No. 260 (5/2006), pp. 10-12

³⁸ Lê Quý Đôn, *Phủ Biên Tạp Lục* 撫邊雜錄 [The Frontier Chronicles] (hereafter PBTL), (Hanoi: Khoa học xã hội, 1977), Trịnh Hoài Đức, *Gia Định Thành Thông Chí* [Gia Định Gazetteer] (hereafter GDTTC), (Hochiminh City: Nxb Dong Nai, 2004), Quốc sử quán Triều Nguyễn, *Đại Nam Thực Lục Tiền Biên* [Veritable record of the Great South], (hereafter DNLTB), (Hanoi: Nxb Hội sử học, 1962), Quốc sử quán Triều Nguyễn, *Đại Nam Liệt Truyện Tiền Biên* [Arrayed Biographies of the Great South], (hereafter DNLTB), (Hue: Thuận Hóa, 1993), Liam C. Kelley, *Thoughts on Chinese Diaspora: The case of the Macs of Hatien*, *Crossroad*, 14. 1 (2000), pp. 71-98, Li Tana and Nola Cookes, eds., *Water Frontier*, (Singapore: Rowman & Littlefield publishers, INC, 2004), Yumio Sakurai, *Eighteenth-Century Chinese Pioneers on the Water Frontier of Indochina*, (Singapore: Rowman & Littlefield publishers, INC, 2004), pp. 35-52

³⁹ A vivid example of the multiplicity of history and diversity of cultural interaction can be seen through the case of Hội An, see Li Tana, *Nguyễn Cochinchina: Southern Vietnam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, *Studies on Southeast Asia* 23 (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 1998); Charles Wheeler, "*Cross-Cultural Trade and Trans-Regional Networks in the Port of Hoi An: Maritime Vietnam in the Early Modern Era*" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 2001); Charles Wheeler, *One Region, Two Histories: Cham Precedents*

on the way how the Vietnamese recognized and conceptualized all the elements of change and factors existing inside their political space stretching from the north to the south.* Soon after setting up in the new land, the Vietnamese enjoyed economic development and political dynamism which rarely saw in their previous location in the north. The new land was described in prosperity, “Birds fly to their heart’s content across the fields, fish race in droves in the immense sea and lakes”,⁴⁰ by which, they could diversify their economic nature, engage more with maritime trade in the South China Sea and other parts of mainland Southeast Asia. In term of ethnicity and culture, it would be interesting to illuminate how Vietnamization was extended from Thuận Quảng to Cà Mau and Hà Tiên during these two centuries. The ethnic Vietnamese was put interminably among Cham, Khmer, Chinese, Malay, Bana and so on as Nguyễn Phúc Lan (1635-1648) once instructed, “South of Thăng Bình and Điện Bàn lies the old territory of Champa where very few [ethnic Vietnamese] people live. If we put the capture soldiers [war captive from the Outer Region, 1648] on this land, give them oxen and farm implements, provide them with food to eat, and let them clear the land, then in several years they could provide enough for their own needs. After they marry and have children, in twenty years the children can be soldiers for the country”.⁴¹ To legitimate the establishment of Vietnamese power, cults of foreign deities were accepted, meanwhile, the Vietnamese also introduced their own deities into the local shrines.⁴² Furthermore, in the other way around, the Southern Vietnamese cultural structure adopted many new aspects of the local belief and foreign religions, despite the leader’s family came from Confucian society in the

in the History of the Hoi An Region, in Anthony Reid and Tuyet Nhung Tran, eds., Vietnam: Borderless History (2006), pp. 163-193; Kikuchi Seiichi, Nghiên cứu đô thị cổ Hội An-từ quan điểm Khảo cổ học lịch sử [Researching the ancient town of Hoi An-from the perspective of historical archaeology, (Hanoi: The Gioi, 2010)

* See the interrelation between the changing landscape and history, Ian D. Whyte, Landscape and History since 1500 (London: Reaktion Books, 2002)

⁴⁰ Li Tana, Nguyễn Cochinchina, p. 14

⁴¹ DNTL TB, Vol. 1, p. 78

⁴² Nguyễn Thế Anh, “The Vietnamization of the Cham Deity Po Nagar”, in K. W. Taylor and John K. Whitmore, eds., Essays into the Vietnamese Past (Ithaca, N. Y: Cornell University SEAP, 1995), pp. 42-50

north. Thus, the Southern culture was more Buddhist and less Confucian than the northern pattern.*

In short, it is possible to suggest that the establishing of the Nguyễn Dynasty in 1802 is essentially seen as a heritage of 224 year-evolution of Vietnamese history. Within this framework, rather than being a territorial extension geographically, the Southward movement has significantly changed the discourse and structure of Vietnam's history since the sixteenth century. The new land was introduced as a source of cultural and technical dynamism that generated power for autonomous dynasties. For Nguyễn Cochinchina, Tây Sơn, and Nguyễn Ánh, their economic, political and military power were built by connecting with various ethnic groups, opening their spatial consciousness where sovereignty was gradually set up.⁴³ Beside, Nam Tiến brings into Vietnamese society a new view toward foreign trade, ethnic, cultural, and technical exchange and those external factors more or less have a significant contribution to the success of the Inner Region's model. The rising of Nguyễn Cochinchina originally comes from benefit of overseas trade relation at the very zenith of the Southeast Asian Age of Commerce,⁴⁴ and adopting new military techniques to successfully protect themselves. Finally, the event in which Nguyễn Ánh came to power and the North-South confrontation for power came to an end in 1802 can be interpreted as the final victory of the young, active, and open South against the rigid and conservative North.

Spatial Redistribution of the Demographic, Economic and Political Paradigm

The spatial consciousness is fundamentally associated with shifting demographic terrain and geopolitical structure. In this part I examine the transformation over the political surface. It implies that the old model of Vietnamese

* See HNKS (1963) and PBTL, for an illuminating discussion of the cultural pattern of the South Vietnam, see Li Tana, An Alternative Vietnam? The Nguyễn Kingdom in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Mar., 1998), pp. 112-117, Charles Wheeler, Buddhism in the re-ordering of an early modern world: Chinese missions to Cochinchina in the seventeenth century, *Journal of Global History* (2007) 2, pp. 303-324

⁴³ Tạ Chí Đại Trường, *Lịch sử nội chiến*, p. 348

⁴⁴ See National Committee for the International Symposium on the Ancient Town of Hoi An, *Đô Thị Cổ Hội An* [The Ancient Town of Hoi An] (Hanoi: Khoa học Xã hội, 1991)

history in the Red River delta has been challenged and then overcome by the rise of the South. By this mean, there was a turning of power from the north to the centre and the south.

Between 1558 and the 1850, it is reported of a significant demographic shift throughout the eastern mainland. There were more than 3,120,000 people had already left in North Vietnam (North Vietnam and Thanh Hóa, Nghệ An, Hà Tĩnh Provinces) in the early fifteenth century based on the population census made in the Tran period.⁴⁵ The flow of population from North and Central to South Vietnam is clearly seen for centuries due to the factors of famine, natural disasters and warfare. In the year 1807, for instance, as Sakurai suggests, abandoned villages were found in 59 of the 190 *châu* [mountains prefectures] and *huyện* [delta prefectures] in North Vietnam.⁴⁶ The drain of population even reached to Hanoi as mentioned by Cao Bá Quát during the Minh Mạng Reign, “There is only one or two tenth of population left. The sufferings from recruiting soldiers and corvée are endless. Those who have young child and poor children, all fled from villages.”⁴⁷ At the same time, apart from those waves of the Viet migration from the north, population growth in the Central and South Vietnam were also significantly higher than the North.⁴⁸ Other sources of demographic contribution for the Inner Region are war captives (including soldiers and civilians) and other ethnic groups from China or Cambodia. The Nguyễn family of Tây Sơn, for instance, was captured from Nghệ An between 1653 and 1657 and put in Quy Nhơn.⁴⁹ Thousands of Chinese also settled in Mỹ Tho, Biên Hòa, Hà Tiên, and Sài Gòn in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the mid-eighteenth century, the French missionary Jean Koffer estimated that there were at minimum thirty thousand Chinese in Cochinchina and the number grew significantly during the early nineteenth century. It is suggested that there were 20,241 Chinese officially registered

⁴⁵ Gourou, Pierre, *Le paysans du Delta Tonkinois* (Paris: Mouton, 1936), p. 174, Yamamoto Tatsuro, *Annanshi Kenkyu* (1) [Research on the History of Annam] (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppan, 1950), p. 607, Yumio Sakurai, *Peasant Drain and Abandoned Villages in the Red River Delta between 1750 and 1850*, p. 133

⁴⁶ Yumio Sakurai, *Peasant Drain and Abandoned Villages in the Red River Delta between 1750 and 1850*, in Anthony Reid, ed., *The Last Stand of Asian Autonomies* (1997), p. 135

⁴⁷ Cao Bá Quát, *Thơ chữ Hán Cao Bá Quát* [Cao Ba Quat's Works in Chinese], introduced by Vũ Khiêu, (Hanoi: Nxb Văn học, H., 1970), p. 328

⁴⁸ Li Tana, *Nguyễn Cochinchina*, p. 29

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 28

in Quảng Nam alone in 1805.⁵⁰ The fluid of population in South Vietnam become more diverse with the coming of the Khmer and Champa who fled civil wars and famines from Cambodia into the Lower Mekong Delta.⁵¹ In 1816, Sài Gòn requested King Chan to recruit 5,000 Cambodian laborers to excavate the Vĩnh Tế Canal and the number reached to 16,000 in 1822 in the reign of Minh Mạng.⁵²

Following the change of demographic trend was the shape of new economic and political paradigm. Only for two centuries, the Lower Mekong Delta gradually replaced the Red River Delta to be a source of the kingdom's economic dynamism. The new and broad land is described with enormous potential for development, "If you want to go to Gia Định, then go there where pure water and white rice are abundant and it is easy to earn living" ["Ai về Gia Định thì về, Nước trong, gạo trắng dễ bề làm ăn"].⁵³ Or "Rice is always available in Đồng Nai; wood is always available in Tân Sai" [Hết gạo thì có Đồng Nai, Hết Củi thì có Tân Sai chờ ra].⁵⁴

GDTTC described cities and economic centers such as Gia Định, Bình Dương, and Tân Long were cosmopolitan with various people settled and made business. They include Chinese [Fukien, Cantonese, Teochiu, Hainan], Khmer, French, British, Macau, Siamese, and Java [Malay] who "live together in a big number". Cities were well-organized with long blocks of high-building, big streets, and ports where any kinds of trading goods could be found. Business occurred day and night in bustle. People lived in prosperity and stylishness, "There is no other place in the kingdom can compare with [Bình Dương, Tân Long]." ⁵⁵ Doãn Uẩn in 1833 was dispatched to Gia Định as a chief officer and special envoy of Minh Mạng, and the following is how the northerner from the Red River Delta wrote about the prosperity of Gia Định. "Fish

⁵⁰ DNTL TB, p. 125, *GDTTC*, p. 110, Jean Koffer, *Description historique de la Cochinchine. Revue Indochoise* 15 (1911), p. 460, William Skinner, "Creolized Chinese Societies in Southeast Asia", in Anthony Reid, ed., *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1996), p. 53

⁵¹ MTGP, p. 43, QTCBTY, pp. 129, 172

⁵² DNTL, Vol. 2, p. 917; QTCBTY, p. 160, Nguyễn Văn Hầu, *Thoại Ngọc Hầu và Những cuộc khai phá miền Hậu Giang* [Thoại Ngọc Hầu and the Reclamation of the Trans-Bassac Region], (Ho Chi Minh City: Nxb Tre, 2006)

⁵³ Nguyễn Thị Thanh Xuân, Nguyễn Khuê, Trần Khuê, *Sài Gòn-Gia Định qua thơ văn xưa* [Sài Gòn-Gia Định through the classic Literature] (hereafter SGGD), (Hochiminh City: Nxb Thành Phố Hồ Chí Minh, 1987), p. 34

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 48

⁵⁵ *GDTTC*, pp. 181, 188, 229

and salt are abundant as soil”.⁵⁶ “At the time of seeding the rice, they just use a bamboo stick weeds on the rice fields. Once they seek rice, they pick weeds only once or twice. They hardly expand any labor in plowing or picking weeds. Once they seed, they never take care of the field, but neither do they ever meet flood and drought. ... The fields are fertile and grains are rich. Forest resources and fishery products are numerous”.⁵⁷ The rising of the South as an economic center was also vividly described in contemporary foreign records. A Japanese sailor, Kondo Morishia, who accidentally passed through Sài Gòn in 1794 because of a storm, wrote that, “This city is in bustle all day and night. Ships from various countries are on the port. The streets become smaller because of so many people”.⁵⁸ Other descriptions on Sài Gòn – Gia Định reported that the city was in glory as one of the most prosperous centers in Southeast Asia. Finlayson stated in 1822 that the business area in Sài Gòn had “the same size as the Siamese capital” and “its streets are well-organized than many western cities”.⁵⁹ The British envoy of John Crawfurd in 1822 wrote that, Sài Gòn is among the best regional rice’s suppliers. ... Recently, the city draw all the Cambodian commerce and eighteen junks, each has loading capacity of 85 tons, have connected between Bangkok and Sài Gòn annually.⁶⁰

In this respect, a simple comparison between the Red River Delta and the Lower Mekong region points out the power shift of the eighteenth century Vietnam. According to Sakurai’s statistics of 49 floods in the Red River delta between 1422 and 1786, 22 occurred in the last 100 years.⁶¹ Thus, there is no need to surprise as Đào Duy Anh mentioned the exhaustion of the Red River Delta, especially after the Reign

⁵⁶ SGGD, p. 117

⁵⁷ Doãn Uẩn, Doãn Tướng Công Hoan Tích (or Tuy Tĩnh Tử Tập Ngôn) [Minister Doan’s chronicle of office, or Tuy Tĩnh Tử’s miscellaneous notes], (1842, Hanoi: Viện Hán Nôm A. 2177), pp. 13-34, quoted in Choi Byung Wook, *Southern Vietnam*, p. 70

⁵⁸ Kondo Morishega, Nam Phiêu Ký 1794 [Record of an Adventure in the South], BEFEO, 1933, p. 87

⁵⁹ G. Finlayson, Mission to Siam and Hue (1821-1822), (London: 1826), p. 305

⁶⁰ A. Lamb, The Mandarin road to old Huế: narratives of Anglo-Vietnamese diplomacy from the 17th century to the eve of the French conquest (Edinburgh: Archon Books, 1970), pp. 224, 258, 205, John Crawfurd, Journal of an Embassy to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China, reprint (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1987)

⁶¹ Yumio Sakurai, A Study on the Peasant Drain during Le Dynasty in Vietnam, To-nan A ja Kenkuy 1,16 (1978): 137

of Lê Thánh Tông (1460-1497).⁶² Tạ Chí Đại Trường shares the same view when he finds part of the reasons for Tây Sơn's rising power in the late eighteenth century in the weakness of the north after ten centuries of exploiting the land and using a rigid political system.⁶³ And here is the way a southerner, Nguyễn Huệ, looking at the north, "the royal *khí* [vital energy] is totally finished in Thăng Long where population becomes scattered".⁶⁴

The decline of Thăng Long- Hà Nội went through early nineteenth century. Basically, the unified Nguyễn dynasty had no proper attention to economic development and urban organization in Hanoi. In addition, Huế administration had faced troubles to manage their economic policy in the Red River delta which one among those is the embarrassing debate on whether the dyke systems along the Red River is maintained or not for decades from Gia Long to Tự Đức. As a result, between 1800 and 1900, floods had destroyed the delta for 21 times.⁶⁵ Other reports show urban organization in Hanoi was in bad situation. "The road is terrible, they are often so small. ... Along those roads, there are dirty mires without drainage. ... Even, wayfarers sometime have to paddle into feet of mud."⁶⁶ Furthermore, the lost of population and the coming back of ruralization into many parts of the city left a great impact on its decline as an economic and political center. Some villages were described that having only three or four *đình*.⁶⁷

Coming across Nguyễn chronicles, recorded historical events show that Hanoi lost its role as political center and social model for all Vietnam, most of important

⁶² Đào Duy Anh, Việt Nam lịch sử Giáo Trình [A Textbook of Vietnamese History], Thời kỳ tự chủ, quyển hạ, Liên khu IV xuất bản, 1950, tr. 25, 26, notes No. 1

⁶³ Tạ Chí Đại Trường, Lịch sử nội chiến ở Việt Nam, p. 349

⁶⁴ Ngô Cao Lãng, Lịch triều tạp ký, p. 642

⁶⁵ Nguyễn Thế Anh, Kinh tế xã hội Việt Nam dưới các vua triều Nguyễn [Economy and Society of Vietnam under the Reign of Nguyễn Kings] (Sài Gòn: Trình Bầy, 1968), pp. 71-73, Oliver Tessier, "Tính năng động của công trình thủy lợi châu thổ sông Hồng dưới triều Nguyễn" [The Activeness of the Hydraulic System in the Red River Delta under the Nguyễn Dynasty], in Kỷ yếu hội thảo khoa học Chúa Nguyễn và Vương triều Nguyễn trong lịch sử Việt Nam từ thế kỷVI đến thế kỷ XIX [Proceedings of the Conference in the Nguyễn Lords and the Nguyễn Dynasty in Vietnamese History from the 16th to the 19th Centuries], eds. Ủy ban nhân dân tỉnh Thanh Hóa and Hội Khoa học Lịch sử Việt Nam (Hanoi: Thegioi, 2008), pp. 399-416

⁶⁶ Nguyễn Thừa Hỷ, Đỗ Bang, Nguyễn Văn Đăng, Đô thị Việt Nam dưới triều Nguyễn [The Vietnamese Cities during the Nguyễn Dynasty], (Huế: Nxb Thuận Hóa, 1999), p. 16-17

⁶⁷ DNTL, vol. 18, p. 35, *đình*: men were between 18 and 60 who pay taxes and covrée for the state.

events happened in Huế and Gia Định. Huế became the capital city and new kingdom's geo-body made the Central Region compatibles as “a pole connecting Vietnam's two baskets” between two agricultural and demographic cores. In Minh Mạng's words, the capital was described not only as a geographical strategic position but also the region vis-à-vis the “miraculous spirit power” of Nguyễn's ancestors for generations.⁶⁸ On the other hand, Gia Định is found as base of Nguyễn power from which, Nguyễn Ánh came to the throne. “Gia Định has strategic mountains and rivers, strong armies, abundant rice; people are good at navigation, can dominate barbarians surrounding, and control Siam and Chenzla; the region is also the demographic convergence of various foreign countries; therefore, [all those factors] creating a strong and prosperous South Region of our Viet Kingdom”.⁶⁹ In addition, the increasing political integration with Siam and Cambodia in the reign of Minh Mạng offers Gia Định a special position as the second political center. In fact, most of military campaigns in Cambodia were launched from Gia Định where Siamese and Cambodian envoys had to stop off and wait for instructions from Huế.

Shaping new power structure clearly reflects effort of the Vietnamese in politically and militarily integrating with the mainland. The region became more integrated and Vietnam was becoming a main player in this “field of power”. The more Vietnamese involved with radical organization of the mainland Southeast Asia the more different they made from China.⁷⁰ Interestingly, the Vietnamese of the early nineteenth century was in the great awareness of change in regional context, especially the coming of British Burma and Malaya, and the decline of China in the 1840s war. Therefore, more attentions were paid to Southeast Asia than ever before through Huế's foreign policy. Every year, state's ships were sent to Singapore, Batavia, Malaya and Siam for trade, geographical records and sending people overseas to study foreign languages.⁷¹ Dai Nam enjoyed regional integration with the

⁶⁸ MNCY, Vol. 3, p. 247-48

⁶⁹ GDTTC, p. 120

⁷⁰ Victor Lieberman, Local Integration and Eurasian Analogies: Structuring Southeast Asian History, c. 1350-c.1830, *Modern Asian Studies*, 27, 3(1993), p. 539

⁷¹ Nhu Viễn [The Harmonious management of distant peoples], in Khâm Định Đại Nam Hội Điển Sự Lệ [Official Compendium of Institutions and usage of Imperial Vietnam], vol. 1 (Sài Gòn: Bo Giao Duc, 1965), pp. 119-129, Tong Phuc Ngoan, Duong Van Chau, Xiem La quoc lo trinh tap luc [Collected Records of travel itineraries to Siam], ed. Chen Chingho (Hong Kong: New Asia Research

rest of Southeast Asia as a regional power. This is not a new phenomenon which took root from the age of Nguyễn Cochinchina when the Vietnamese power and attention kept moving southward and gradually found themselves an ambitious position in the Southeast Asian world.

3.3. Space of State-making

“Maps blossom in the springtime of the state”.⁷²

The transformation from pre-modern to early modern experiences the phenomenon of early nation building throughout the mainland. The foundation of three great dynasties in Burma, Siam, and Vietnam saw the primary contours of the region take shape from which geobody of proto-nation state can be recognized. Regional political change is propelled by new burst of energy coming from a complex array of forces. “The cumulative impact of population growth and movement, with the related problems of resource mobilization and economic competition, the maturing and leavening of religious and political ideology and the importation of Western arms, launched mainland Southeast Asia into the most spectacular and expansive era of indigenous statehood and centralization.”⁷³ The expansion in case of Siam and Đại Nam during the king Rama III and Minh Mạng in particular, is the establishment of state to the maximum limits of growth and geographical space. Many parts of those previously were considered as margin and periphery or invisible for state concern; then became main playground for power confrontation and effort of territorial annexation. In this process, geography becomes crucial for any attempt of managing space. As state is in making, power of geography and cartography is strategically used

Institute Material Series No. 2, Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1966), Geoff Wade, A Coastal Route from the Lower Mekong Delta to Terengganu, in *Water Frontier*, pp. 175-189; “Trần Tây Phong Tục Ký: A Custom of Cambodia”, trans., by Nola Cooke and Li Tana, *Chinese Southern Diaspora Studies*, Volume 1, 2007, Phan Huy Chu, Hai Trinh Chi Luoc, trans. Phan Huy Le, Claudi Salmon, Ta Trong Hiep, (Paris: Association de l'Archipel, 1994)

⁷² Denis Wood (with John Fels and John Krygier), *Rethinking the Power of Maps* (London, New York: The Guilford Press, 2010), p. 15

⁷³ J. Kathirithaby-Wells, “The Age of transition: the Mid-eighteenth century to the early nineteenth centuries”, in *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, Vol. 1: From Early Times to c. 1800 (Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 573

to acknowledge space and create state's version of space. The way Siam and Vietnam reorganized space in the early nineteenth century shows significant change of human geography via producing more diversified social and political landscape.

Regarding to the way state organizes space, scholarship on Southeast Asia explains early political organization through factors of environment and "demographic immaturity". As a result, "power was seen as something to be concentrated and accumulated around the person of the ruler. This is the way in which Southeast Asian rulers handled their subject populations".⁷⁴ It is also worth to note that political model suggested for early Southeast Asia, "galactic polities", "cycles of Kings", and "mandalas" deal mostly with the structure of power than the boundary and these notions are not necessarily territorial.⁷⁵ Without doubt, those terms have a significant contribution to enrich our understanding the political paradigm of pre-modern Southeast Asia. However, it is possible and necessary to raise the quest for unfolding the idea of space and boundary in the indigenous Southeast Asian worldview. Southeast Asia avoids the colonial and Eurocentric implications to its geopolitical surface. The expression is based on the compass points around a geographical "Central Asia", and refers to the octant between East and South Asia. An arbitrary imposition arising from the territorial preoccupations of European colonialism, these borders do not demarcate distinct cultural or ecological zones, or historical polities, and the countries that make up Southeast Asia are all multi-ethnic, with a mix cultures and social systems co-existing within their boundaries. There have been serious if not very satisfying suggestions that this diversity and its corollary, the

⁷⁴ Carl Trocki, *Chinese Revenue Farmers*, p. 339 quoted Benedict Anderson, *Language and Power: Exploring Political cultures in Indonesia* (Ithaca, N. Y and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 17-77, Eric Tagliacozzo, *Secret Traders, Porous Borders: Smuggling and States along a Southeast Asian Frontier, 1865-1915* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005)

⁷⁵ Stanley Tambiah, *World conqueror and world Renouncer: a study of Buddhism and polity in Thailand against a historical background* (Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 134-7, Oliver W. Wolters, *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: ISEAS, 1999), pp. 27-28

lack of a regional consciousness, might be taken as identifying features of the region.⁷⁶

Moreover, political philosophy and idea of power in traditional Southeast Asia are different from peoples to peoples. The Burmese for centuries tried to maintain the power structure and administrative system over the three main political spaces of the nuclear zone, the zone of dependent provinces, and the zone of tributary.⁷⁷ Other, like Srivijaya, Champa enjoyed the “politics of plunder”.⁷⁸ For the Indian Golconda King in the 1680s, the Siamese vast land is space of “forests and mosquitoes”, meanwhile his kingdom is smaller, but full of men”.⁷⁹ In fact, the population density in the Southeast Asia in 1600 was roughly 5.5 persons per square kilometer (compared with roughly 35 for India and China).⁸⁰ Thus, there is no surprise that the Siamese during the Ayutthaya and early Bangkok Era searched for manpower from any directions and in any military campaigns.*

⁷⁶ Paul H, Kratoska, Rremco Raben, and Henk Schulte Nordholt, “Locating Southeast Asia”, in *Locating Southeast Asia: Geographies of Knowledge and Politics of Space*, eds. Paul H, Kratoska, Rremco Raben, and Henk Schulte Nordholt (Singapore, NUS Press, 2005), p. 3

⁷⁷ Victor Lieberman, *Burmese Administrative Cycles: Anarchy and Conquest, c. 1580-1760* (Princeton, N. J: Princeton University Press, 1984)

⁷⁸ See more in Chau Ju-kua, *Chau Ju-kua: his work on the Chinese and Arab trade in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries*, entitled *Chu-fan-chi*, trans. from the Chinese and annotated by Friedrich Hirth and W.W. Rockhill, Oriental Press, 1966, Oliver Wolters, *Early Indonesian Commerce: A Study of Srivijaya* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1967), Momoki Shiro, “Was Champa a Pure Maritime Polity? Agriculture and Industry Recorded in Chinese Documents”. Presented at 1998 Core University Seminar, Kyoto University and Thammasat University, “Eco-History and Rise/Demise of the Dry Areas in Southeast Asia”, *Kyoto University Japan*, October 13-16, 1998, Kenneth R. Hall, “The Politics of Plunder in the Cham Realm of Early Vietnam”, in Robert van Neil, eds., *Art and Politics in Southeast Asia History: Six Perspectives* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Southeast Asian Paper, No. 32, 1989), pp. 5-32, idem, “An Economic History of Early Southeast Asia”, in Nicholas Tarling, ed., *Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, Vol. 1. (Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 252-60,

⁷⁹ Nicolas Gervaise, *The Natural and Political History of the Kingdom of Siam*, trans. John Villiers (Bangkok, 1989), p. 27

⁸⁰ Colin McEvedy and Richard Jones, *Atlas of World Population History* (London, 1978), pp. 166–97, Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450–1680*, vol. 1, *The Lands Below the Winds* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 15, Vol. 2. *Expansion and Crisis* (New Haven, 1993), p. 15, James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 4

* David Chandler, *Facing Cambodian the Past* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1996), p. 91, mentioned a palm leaf chronicle at Wat Srolauv [1856], in north central Cambodia suggested that during the wartime, many Khmer escaped into Siam and King Rama III “allowed to settle and grow rice” along the border. Also Mayoury Ngaosyvathn and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn, *Paths to Conflagration: Fifty years of diplomacy and warfare in Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam: 1778-1828* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 231. The search for manpower was continuous increase in

On the other hand, the Chinese has a famous quote that being favor for all of their kings: "under the Heaven, nothing is not the king's land. The people who lead the lands, no one are not the king's subjects" [普天之下，莫非王土，率土之濱，莫非王臣]. However, those examples show the obvious fact that indigenous ideology of space and boundary seem to overlook and underestimate in modern scholarship on Southeast Asia. In this respect, there is a clear and rigid frontier dividing the premodern geographical discourse and the shape of modern nation state: the coming of western ideas of geography, territory, and boundary. The phenomenon sometime is described as a revolution helps to dismiss "the law of Southeast Asian inertia" which have dominated the indigenous peoples for thousands years.⁸¹ Among scholarship on Southeast Asia, Thongchai has successfully and vividly showed the evolution of Siamese perception of space, territory, boundary, and sovereignty between the traditional cosmology and modern geography. The suggestion is that, "As with other nations outside Europe, historical regards Siam's struggles against European imperialism in the nineteenth century as the advent of the modern nation". By this mean, despite "pre-modern societies never lacked the knowledge and technology to conceive the space", the fact is the "geobody" of the Siamese modern nation is essentially a product of "the coming of new geography", "clashes of concepts of boundary", conflicts and treaties with the West, and the introduction of mapping in western style as a new technology of space.⁸² By taking the increasing body of geographical knowledge in Siam and Vietnam as point of departure, it is hope that some light can be shed upon the process in which state recognizes and reconstructs space as part of state building.

Using Power of Geography and Cartography for building State

Siam between 1778 and 1828. Mayoury and Pheuiphanh also demonstrated vividly this phenomenon in case of Lao areas, see "Slave Raids in Lao Areas", pp. 45-50. Puangthong also mentioned about the Siamese control the Khmer population in Cambodian western provinces of Battambang and Siam Reap, Puangthong Rungswasdisab, "War and Trade: Siamese Interventions in Cambodia, 1767-1851" (Univ. of Wollongong Ph.D. diss., 1995), chapter. VI; Pasuk Phongpaichit & Chris Baker, Thailand: Economy and Politics (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 13

⁸¹ Victor Lieberman, Strange Parallels, vol. 1, p. 8

⁸² Thongchai, Siam Mapped, pp. x, 13, 18, 37, 68-69, 113

The body of geographies of knowledge was significantly enriched by Vietnamese between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries although modern scholarly attention seems to pay less to such achievements and how those bodies of knowledge shaped the political philosophy of space. Sixteenth century Europe, for instance, shows how the power of geography changes the course of history and new cartography took part in introducing modern image of the world for centuries. In fact, the whole motion of the sixteenth century Nam Tiến seems to come after such a geopolitical instruction: “*Hoành sơn nhất đái, vạn đại dung thân*” [橫山壹帶萬代容身]. The Hoanh Son mountain region would be suitable for inhabiting for thousands of generations]. Following the Vietnamese footstep southward, the first discourse of spatial consciousness is the recognition of regional spaces such as, Hoan Châu, Ô Châu, Thuận Quảng, Gia Định, Hà Tiên.⁸³ There is no surprise that most of the geographical knowledge we have today came from the time of Nguyễn Ánh/Gia Long. Launching military campaigns for twenty-five years over the Gulf of Siam, Siam, Cambodia, Laos, and the whole Vietnam, this remarkable historical figure understands the significant of geography and using the capability to come to power.

As the first Vietnamese ruler who realized the coherence and potential of the Lower Mekong as a source of his power, Nguyễn Ánh, even in the wartime against Tây Sơn, had ordered to draw map of *Trấn Biên, Phiên Trấn, Long Hồ* in 1779.⁸⁴ After coming to the throne, under his instruction, several remarkable gazetteers were compiled which for the first time have introduced the unified geographical body of the kingdom as a whole. Since 1803, Gia Long also ordered Lê Quang Định to “collect all the existed texts, the South, from the capital to Hà Tiên, the North, (from the capital) to Lạng Sơn, every river, mountain, route, seaport, bridge, markets, street, custom, and natural resources, all need to be recorded in detail”.⁸⁵ The Northern and Southern Regions had Gia Long’s great attention. In 1805, the new emperor ordered five commanderies of *Gia Định*, including *Phiên Trấn, Trấn Biên, Vĩnh Trấn, Trấn*

⁸³ Nguyễn Cảnh Thị, *Thiên Nam Liệt Truyện Hoan Châu Ký* [Record of the Nguyễn Canh family in Hoan Chau prefecture] (Hanoi: Thegioi, 2011), Dương Văn An, Ô Châu Cận Lục, (Hanoi: Giao Duc, 2009)

⁸⁴ GDTTC, p. 114

⁸⁵ QTCBTY, p. 89

Định and *Hà Tiên* to record in detail their history, boundary, natural resources, traffic routes, rivers and mountains, and to draw maps, then submit to the court.⁸⁶ In the north, in 1804, he also requested a new land measurement policy and re-counted the area of rice fields.⁸⁷ From land survey was carefully conducted throughout the kingdom. Most achievement of this process is in 1836 all lands and villages throughout the kingdom were mapped into cadastral records [*địa bạ*] which those documents remains including 10,044 collections of 15,000 volumes available.⁸⁸

Gia Long 嘉隆's successors, Minh Mạng 明命 (1820-1840), Thiệu Trị 紹治 (1841-1847), and Tự Đức 嗣德 (1845-1883) all encouraged compiling geographical and historical records on Đại Nam and other countries such as China and Southeast Asia. In fact, Nguyễn Kings were all interested in gaining correct information about China. All Nguyễn envoys dispatched to China were compelled to send back rigorously defined reports of what they saw there. Those reports were officially known as the "Daily chronicles of the progress of the Embassy" [*Sứ trình nhật ký*]. In April 1832, Minh Mạng reprimanded three returning envoys because their records failed to meet the emperors' standards for them.⁸⁹

In addition, the amount of geographical knowledge came from missions and envoys those were dispatched overseas for trade and geographical records, and even for learning foreign language.⁹⁰ Chen Chingho reports that between 1778 and 1847, Nguyễn rulers dispatched to the Southern Sea three diplomatic missions, 11 trading missions to Batavia (1791, 1825, 1832, 1832/33, 1836, 1836/37, 1839, 1849, 1842, 1844, and 1846/47), six envoys to Singapore (1832, 1836/37, 1840, 1842, 1844, and 1846/47), two other to Western Sea (1835/36 and 1839), two missions to Penang (1832 and 1836/37), two missions to Semarang (Java Island, 1839, 1849), two

⁸⁶ GDTTC, p. 115

⁸⁷ QTCBTY, p. 80

⁸⁸ Nguyễn Đình Đầu, *Việt Nam, Quốc Hiệu và Cương vực qua các thời đại* [Vietnam's official name and territory through history], (Hochiminh City: Nxb Trẻ, 2005), p. 85

⁸⁹ Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, pp. 118-119

⁹⁰ See Nhu Viễn [The harmonious management of distant peoples], in *Khâm Định Đại Nam Hội Điển Sự Lệ* [Official Compendium of Institutions and Usages of Imperial Dai Nam], vol. 1 (Sài Gòn: Bo Giao Duc, 1965)

mission to Luzon (1832, 1835), one mission to Johor (1797) and one mission to Goa/Malabar (1793).⁹¹ As a result, those journal records have significantly improved Vietnamese understanding of Southeast Asia and contributed to adopt a fresh policy toward other kingdoms in the region. On the other hand, for twenty-five years in exile in the Gulf of Siam and the southwest Indochina, the first Nguyễn king was a man of considerable personal geographical knowledge and understood its power. Many geographical records were come under his direct instruction. In 1810, the text of *Collected Routes to the Country of Siam* [*Xiêm la quốc lộ trình tạp lục*] was compiled by his two officers, Tống Phúc Ngoạn and Dương Văn Châu. The crucial remarkableness of the record is that, as demonstrated by Wade, “unlike earlier Arab and Chinese routers for Southeast Asia, this collection provides highly detailed directions and information about six different routes by land and sea that connected the ports, estuaries, islands, and settlements of mainland Southeast Asia”.⁹² Others were found of no less significant and took part in shaping the view of early nineteenth century Vietnamese about their regional space. They include Lý Văn Phức’s *Tây hành kiến văn kỷ lược* [Record of what had been seen or heard through a Westward Journey, 1830], Phan Huy Chú’s *Hải Trình Chí Lược* [Concise Record of a Maritime Journey, 1833], Trần Tây Phong *Thổ ký* [The Custom of the Western Protectorate, c. 1830s], Phạm Đình Hồ’s *Đại Man Quốc Địa Đồ* [Maps of Cambodia], and *Ai Lao Sứ Trình* [Journal of An Envoy to Laos].

Since its founding in July 1820, the Court Institute of National History [*Quốc sử quán Triều Nguyễn*] has indispensable role to promote the increase in number of both official and private geographical records. In fact, most of gazetteers available for us today came from early nineteenth century texts, such as Lê Quang Định’s *Hoàng Việt Nhất Thống Dư Địa Chí* [Geography of the Unified Vietnamese Kingdom], Trịnh Hoài Đức’s *Gia Định Thành Thông Chí* [Gia Định Gazetteer, c. 1820], Phan Huy Chú’s *Lịch Triều Hiến Chương Loại Chí* [The Classified Survey of the Institution of

⁹¹ Phan Huy Chu, *Hải Trình Chí Lược: Récit sommaire d’un voyage en mer (1833)*, trans. Phan Huy Le, Ta Trong Hiep and Claudine Salmon, *Cahier d’Archipel*, Vol. 25 (Paris: Association Archipel, 1994), p. 127

⁹² Geoff Wade, “A Coastal Route from the Lower Mekong Delta to Terrengganu, in Li Tana and Nola Cooke, eds., *Water Frontier* (2004), pp. 175-190. For more detailed, see Tong Phuc Ngoan and Duong Van Chau, *Xiêm La Quoc Lo Trình Tạp Lục*, ed. Chen Chingho (Hong Kong: New Asia Research Institute Historical Material Series No. 2, Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1966)

Successive Courts', 1819], Hoàng Việt Địa Dư Chí [Geography of Imperial Vietnam, 1833], Phạm Đình Hồ's *An Nam Chí* [Record of Annam], *Ô Châu Lục* [Record of Ô prefecture], *Kiên Khôn Nhất Lãm* [An Overview of the Universe]. For all Nguyễn Kings, geographical knowledge was become vital for their policies and appealed as an evidence for their insight in spatial awareness. In 1817, Gia Long ordered to compile a Coastal Records [*Duyên Hải Lục*] from Hà Tiên to Yên Quảng, which “describe in detail all seaports, estuaries, and roads”. The work includes two volumes, covers fifteen commanderies, 143 seaports, on the coast in length of 5,902 dặm.⁹³ Drawing maps of all provinces from the North to the South also was one of Minh Mạng's priorities in the first year of his reign.⁹⁴

As a result, new cartography emerged to transfer such rising body of knowledge. As John K. Whitmore and other point out, between the Hồng Đức Map 宏德本圖 in the reign of Lê Thánh Tông and those at the end of the Lê Dynasty in 1787, official maps of Đại Việt maintained all the appearances despite population growth and some changes occurred in the organization of the kingdom. Change has come when the Nguyễn dynasty came to power in 1802, “one necessary task was to gather maps from all parts of the country and all prior regimes in order to begin the cartographic integration of Vietnam, now unified from China to Cambodia. The Nguyễn officials had to go beyond the frozen traditional of the Lê, based as it was on the fifteenth century work, and add the territory that Vietnamese society had encompassed under its own regime in the south”. For this purpose, the simplicity and sketchiness of the Lê style of maps were superseded by the influence coming from the advances in Western and Chinese cartographies.⁹⁵ To be sure, Vietnamese is not the only peoples in Southeast Asia to develop new geography and cartography in the early nineteenth century but it is possibly no exaggeration to say that they are among the leadings in this field. Their position of pioneers were underlined in the regional

⁹³ QTCBTY, p. 132

⁹⁴ MMCY, Vol. 3, pp. 227-228

⁹⁵ See John K. Whitmore, “Cartography in Vietnam”, pp. 486, 498-99; Đặng Phương Nghi, *Les institutions publiques du Viet-Nam au XVIII siècle* (Paris: Ecole Française d' Extrême-Orient, 1969), 77-79; Gaspardone, “Bibliographie,” 47 (note 11), noted a report of a 1723 “newly established map” that maintained the old Hong-due system. Also see more about Vietnamese cartography in Thomas Suárez, *Early mapping of Southeast Asia* (Tuttle Publishing, 1999)

circumstance that Siamese had to wait for the coming of western missionaries in the 1830s in getting new geography and a British map-maker, James Low, wrote in 1824 that “of all the maps of the World we have until now, what covers Siam, Laos and Cambodia is nothing”.⁹⁶ As a branch of human endeavor, cartography has a long and interesting history that well reflects the state of cultural activity, as well as the perception on the world, in different periods.⁹⁷ Nineteenth century Vietnamese cartography shows diverse, insightful, and careful approach to their surface and the broader geographical view of the international sense which they were regionally involving.

The increase in number of maps drawing in western style about both Đại Nam and its neighbors suggests that power of geography has actively engaged with the early nineteenth century Vietnamese political discourse. This phenomenon seems to take root in the Tây Sơn period. During the last decade of Tây Sơn, military campaigns to Laos were launched twice until Luang Prabang was captured and the Vietnamese footsteps had to stop in front of the Siamese frontier.⁹⁸ Map of the Barbarian Kingdoms [*Đại Man Quốc Đồ*, 1798] is known as the first Vietnamese map has showed political entities of the Tai world stretching from the northwestern mountains province of Hưng Hóa and reflects its view of the Mekong, Chao Phraya, and possibly Salween River systems.⁹⁹ Without doubt, Qing’s three time defeats by Burmese and the continuous and increasing eastern campaigns of Siamese over Laos and Cambodia encouraged Vietnamese with a more serious commitment on regional integration. Cartographic evidences clearly show that this trend was solidly maintained over the next five decades. Frédéric Mantiene implies that the period 1790-1802 marked a revolution in the Vietnamese attitude towards the sea and towards overseas countries. In less than twelve years, the Vietnamese people, who had earlier been described as totally unfit for long-distance navigation, were able

⁹⁶ Thongchai, *Siam Mapped*, p. 37, Lieutenant James Low in an 1824 letter to the Secretary to the Government of Penang (then Prince of Wales Island), see Sternstein, Larry, “LOW’ Maps of Siam, *The Journal of the Siam Society*, Vol. 73, part 1 & 2, Jan-July, 1985, Bangkok, p. 132

⁹⁷ Norman Joseph William Thrower, *Maps & civilization: cartography in culture and society*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 1

⁹⁸ George Dutton, *The Tây Sơn Uprising*, p. 50

⁹⁹ John K. Whitmore, *Cartography in Vietnam*, p. 498. The map is available at the Hamilton Library, University of Hawaii at Manoa, Honolulu (microfilm collection, A. 2499)

to welcome foreign techniques which were not so easy to master, to adapt them to their local conditions, to build a formidable and efficient navy and to man their vessels on high seas.¹⁰⁰

There is no ambiguousness in the perception of Vietnamese of boundary, rather than a concrete borderline which in some cases, were described in detailed in chronicles and gazetteers. The fifteenth century southern border of Đại Việt, for instance, is presented in Phan Huy Chú's *Lịch Triều Hiến Chương Loại Chí*, "Hoài Nhân Prefecture is in the south of Quảng Nam Commandery. It borders with Ai Lao in the west and with Champa in the south. The Thạch Bi Mountain on the coast is the very frontier between the territories of previous dynasties [of Đại Việt] with Champa. ... When Lê Thánh Tông conquered Champa, he ordered to erect stelae at the top of the mountain to mark the frontier, and then appointed the descendants of the Champa royal family to rule; from this mountain to the west is the kingdom of *Nam Bàn*."¹⁰¹

Generally speaking, the evolution of Vietnamese spatial ideology has been continuously re-configured in history. The first line of direction is the North-the South or "*phương Bắc*" and "*phương Nam*" which used to differentiate the Viet's ethnic and cultural space from Han Chinese space. Down to the sixteenth century, political divergence first came to divide the Vietnamese space into two parts of Đông Kinh [the Eastern Capital, the Mac Family] and Thanh-Nghệ [the restored Le Dynasty, Nguyễn and Trinh families] in which each had its emperors who ruled over *Bắc Triều* and *Nam Triều*, or northern and southern dynasties between 1533 and 1592. When the Nguyễn family extended southward and built a new Vietnamese political entity, the discourse of space turned into Đàng Trong and Đàng Ngoài or the Inner Region and the Outer Region. Thus, the frontier of this spatial division moved southward roughly 400 kilometers from present-day Ninh Bình to Quảng Bình. The eighteenth century Tay Son movement marked a significant change to show how the new body of territory was being shaped in the Vietnamese perspectives. Although it is unable for Tayson to reunify and transform the whole their three parts into a single piece of

¹⁰⁰ Frédéric Mantiene, The Transfer of Western Military Technology to Vietnam in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries: The Case of the Nguyễn, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Oct., 2003), pp. 532

¹⁰¹ LTHCLC, Địa dư chí [Geography]

territory, they have referred to the idea of the north, the south and the center. Nguyễn Nhạc claimed himself as *Trung Ương Hoàng đế* [Emperor at the Center], meanwhile, offered his two younger brother as *Bắc Bình Vương* [The pacified king of the North] and *Đông Định Vương* [the Pacified King of the East, refers to Gia Định]. In addition, notions of *Bắc Hà*, *Nam Hà* or the northern river region [the Red River basin] and the southern river region [Gia Định region] were become increasing popular.¹⁰² It reflects the fact that the rising power of the south had widely recognition, particularly from the northern intellectuals. Notwithstanding, those three parts were never *de factor* unified during the Tây Sơn time. The main reason for this failure is their lack of capacity although one among those leaders, Nguyễn Huệ was aware of the need of territorial unification and preparing for a huge southward military campaign when he died in 1792. Thus, no one among Tây Sơn rulers was ready or had experience to rule over a large territory. Besides, regionalism still played as a significant obstacle and it would take another three decades of warfare for the Vietnamese to go beyond the frontiers of fragmentary space.

Although Tây Sơn is the first one who saw Nam Bộ [the South] as a distinct political and economic space by appointing their third leader, Nguyễn Lữ as “Pacified King of the East” to rule the Lower Mekong Delta, I shares Taylor’s view that “Nguyễn Anh was the first person to organize Nam Bộ as a region capable of participating successfully in war and politics among Vietnamese speakers.”¹⁰³ In 1802, enjoying the fruit of victory, the king instructed, “Gia Định is the land for restoration. Civilians, troops, and property are all there.”¹⁰⁴ Also, to legitimize his position on the throne, what Nguyễn Anh tried to do in 1802 can be described as a campaign for national reconciliation to connect all the spaces of the Vietnamese speakers. “Today, the North and the South have reunited into one house”, there is no differentiation among people from *Thuận Hóa*, *Bắc Hà*, *Quảng Nam*, *Quảng Ngãi*, *Quy Nhơn*.¹⁰⁵ And for the former Tây Sơn’s soldiers who fled back to their

¹⁰² See HLNTC, and LTTK

¹⁰³ Keith Taylor, *Surface Orientation*, p. 967

¹⁰⁴ DNTL, Vol. 1, (Hanoi: Giao Duc, 2004), p. 519

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 472, 508

hometowns, [local officers] let them resettle and work without any trouble.¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, Nguyễn Ánh is the first Vietnamese political leader who saw the new geopolitical body as a whole and tried to define this space within the ethnic framework, the Viet. In 1803, he asked the Qing to name his new kingdom as kingdom of Viet in the South [*Nam Việt*].

Vietnam in the late eighteenth century experienced a completely new political context and its future leader required to have an acute aware of this trend as well as of the country's new geography of knowledge, and not less importantly is the consciousness of the cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and powerful-orientated diversity. Quang Trung's policies seemed to reach close to success in his kingdom of the northern Vietnam when he tried to engage more with local elites and encourage building a new cultural, educational identity with the core was *Chữ Nôm* [Sino-Vietnamese script]. Unfortunately, the death of emperor at the age 39 became a disaster for his dynasty and also for “a hope of Vietnamese modernization” as Vietnamese modern scholarship proposes.

It is the time to change the long-standing nationalist view that the way Nguyễn Ánh came to power was narrated as a consequence of assistance from “conservative and reactionary forces” and by this mean, “turning back the course of history” [*kéo lùi bánh xe lịch sử*]. The division of Tây Sơn was limited its capacity and advances, and specially limited the leaders' awareness of changing geo-body and the shift of regional power. Despite Nguyễn Huệ may find the Lower Mekong delta as new source of power,* the existence of Nguyễn Nhạc' space in the Centre region left his no choice. Gia Long showed that he had appeared at the right time, in the right place and his ability and ambition were supported by the most important fruit of Nam Tiến, the wealth of the Lower Mekong delta. Undoubtedly, the understanding power of geography is among factors contributing to Gia Long's success.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 513

* In fact, he was preparing a huge southward campaign when he died. The number of troops is said to 300,000. Tạ Chí Đại Trường, *Lịch sử nội chiến*, p. 258

One of the important aspects of spatial ideology in the early nineteenth century Vietnam is effort of the ruler to unify all the regions of Vietnamese speakers which were described that they all are in the south and ethnically unity, the Vietnamese. Gia Long brought this idea into his own title. The term “Gia Long” was employed following by two words of Gia Định and Thăng Long,¹⁰⁷ as a determination of the king to annex those regions into a single kingdom. In a diplomatic message sent to Qing emperor in 1803, Gia Long wrote, “I have controlled the whole the South [*cõi Nam*], the whole Viet’ land [*đất Việt*].¹⁰⁸ Therefore, the Nguyễn’s spatial perception can be seen as an extended idea of space in comparison with any other rulers before. Although at the zenith of Tây Sơn in 1786, their powers covered from north to south without any competitor, in Nhạc’s view, the North still belongs to another kingdom ruled by legitimated Lê kings. Nhạc sometime was said to have a complex of a rebel,¹⁰⁹ and wanted to stop his “revolution” northward and to keep Nguyễn Huệ away from any northern campaign. Unlike Nhạc, there was no quest for legitimacy like this had been raised to Nguyễn Ánh in 1802. The reason could be found in his overwhelming military control in 1802 which probably dismissed all the opponents in the North and all the opposite vices had been suppressed by the dynasty’s strict code. And in 1838, the second emperor of Nguyễn dynasty Minh Mạng re-named his kingdom as Dai Nam [the Great South] and the idea was that his kingdom’s territory extended along the *Nam Hải* [the South Sea].¹¹⁰ One year later, the king ordered to make a jade seal of the Son of Heaven of the Great South kingdom [*Đại Nam thiên tử chi tĩ*] as same as that of the Chinese emperor, in order to issue in diplomatic affairs (except with China).¹¹¹ Alexander Woodside was among the first who illuminated the idea of territorial consciousness of the title of Dai Nam.¹¹² Of other interpretations,

¹⁰⁷ Phan Thúc Trục, Quốc sử di biên [A Transmitted compilation of the dynasty’s history] (Hong Kong: New Asia Research Institute, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1965), p. 30

¹⁰⁸ QTCBTY, p. 78. See more discussion on this title in Liam C. Kelley, Beyond the Bronze Pillars, p. 79

¹⁰⁹ Tạ Chí Đại Trùng, Lịch sử nội chiến, pp. 146-147

¹¹⁰ Alexander Woodside, “The Relationship between Political Theory and Economic Growth in Vietnam, 1750-1840”, in The Last Stand of Asian Autonomies, ed. Anthony Reid (London: Macmillan, 1997), p. 248

¹¹¹ Yu Insun, Lịch sử quan hệ Việt Nam-Trung Quốc thế kỷ XIX: Thể chế triều cống, thực và hư [History of Vietnamese-Chinese Relationship in the nineteenth century: The tributary system, reality and vainness], Tap chí Nghiên Cứu Lịch sử [Journal of Historical Review], No. 10(2009), p. 9

¹¹² Woodside, Vietnam and the Chinese Model, pp. 120-21, Woodside, The Relationship between Political Theory and Economic, p. 248

Benedict Anderson, for instance, has demonstrated the name as an evolution of Vietnamese political philosophy on the road of modern nation state making. In his words, “This new name is interesting in two respects. First, it contains no 'Vietnamese element. Second, its territorial reference seems purely relational - 'south' (of the Middle Kingdom)”.¹¹³ Those efforts of Nguyễn’s Kings had transferred the idea of spatial unification into intellectuals and elite and in presenting this consciousness, Nguyễn Gia Cát, a Gia Long’s envoy to Beijing in 1803 responded to the Qing’s emperor, “Our Kingdom, from the time of the Trần, Lê and even earlier, has seen its northern and southern portions administered separately. Our current king began [his effort to retake the domain] in Gia Định, and completed [this endeavor] in Thang Long. Therefore, he took the reign title of Gia Long”.¹¹⁴ A central Region’s officer, Lê Văn Phú, who then became governor of Gia Định and Biên Hòa, expressed in a poetry that, “the region of Gia Định is the same as Bình Định which is my home town in the northern Hải Vân Pass”.^{*} Without doubt, the idea of regionalism has significantly changed and early nineteenth century Vietnamese who still did realize of coming from different regions, but also found a geographical and cultural link among them. The psychological phenomenon had strong influences upon people of different regions from the north to the south:

“Làm trai cho đáng nên trai
 Phú Xuân cũng trải, Đồng Nai cũng từng”¹¹⁵
 To act like a man, you have to be a man
 You should experience Phu Xuan, you should be in Dong Nai.

Territorial Consciousness: A National Space

“Our Viet’s Kingdom is formed in *Viêm Thiên* [the South], [geographical shape] as a dragon twines around *Quê Hải* [the South Sea], Gods passed through generations, people are prosperous, things are in glory. There are pure good in prefectures of *Thăng Hoa*, *Điện Bàn*,

¹¹³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition, (London, New York: Verso, 2006), p. 158

¹¹⁴ Liam C. Kelley, *Beyond the Bronze Pillars*, p. 79

^{*} In the 2nd year of the Thiệu Trị Reign, 1842, Lê Văn Phú was appointed as Governor of Gia Định and Biên Hòa. SGGD, p. 118-119

¹¹⁵ SGGD, p. 35

aloe in Khánh Hòa, pearl in Yên Quảng, cinnamon bark in Thanh Hóa. Treasure is in lands, precious artifacts are in seas and mountains.”¹¹⁶

Trịnh Hoài Đức 鄭懷德, c. 1820

New geographical knowledge also has crucial importance to allow the Nguyễn dynasty to reorganize political system, administrative reform, and to conduct economic policies. The Nguyễn’s division of the kingdom into three parts was precisely maintained through the colonial body and is still well applied nowadays. In early days of the Nguyễn Dynasty, the administrative system under the Gia Long Reign was divided into three main parts of Bắc Thành 北城 [the Northern citadel, the territory north from Ninh Bình], Gia Định Thành 嘉定城 [the Gia Định citadel, the south from Bình Thuận], and the Center from Thanh Hóa to Bình Định which respectively refer to the North, the South, and the Central Region. After the Minh Mạng’s administrative reform, the system was turned into administrative organization based on unit of province 省 [*tỉnh*]. There were thirty-one among those have been recorded and most were basically organized in the same structure, exception the capital of Hue. It is clear that since the sixteenth century, Vietnamese paid more attention to regional differentiation among themselves based mostly upon scale of power, culture, and natural landscape. In fact, the discourses such as *Bắc triều*, *Nam triều*, *Đàng trong*, *Đàng Ngoài* are unstable, misunderstood sometime as no more than peripheralizing and centralizing southern rhetoric, and interpreted in different ways because those reflect the contemporary changes of time and space of a long-term process of Nam Tiến. Alexander Rhodes’s 1651 Vietnamese-Portuguese-Latin suggests that *Đàng Trong* could refer to Champa and Cambodia as well as to the Nguyễn domain. The term therefore was not exclusively applied with some imagined Vietnamese polity but had larger spatial significance.¹¹⁷ The fruit of this four hundred year geo-political expansion and is the coming of Nguyễn dynasty and its new

¹¹⁶ GDTTC, p. 15

¹¹⁷ Nguyễn Tài Căn, “Về việc dùng hai động từ “vào”, “ra” để chỉ sự di chuyển đến một địa điểm ở phía nam hay phía bắc trong tiếng Việt hiện đại” [About the Usage of the two Verbs “to go in” and “to go out” to Indicate travel to a point in a southern direction or a northern direction in modern Vietnamese], *Tap chí khoa học* [Journal of Science], 4 (1991), pp. 36-42, Keith Taylor, *Surface Orientation*, pp. 958-59

conceptualization of space, a comprehensive and profound awareness of territory, boundary which the Vietnamese never experienced before. The usage of *Bắc Kỳ*, *Trung Kỳ*, and *Nam Kỳ* 北圻, 中圻, 南圻 [The North, the Central Region, and the South respectively] are popular among the modern Vietnamese [*Miền Bắc*, *Miền Trung*, and *Miền Nam*] vis-à-vis the unit of *tỉnh* or province. This form of spatial axis was introduced to Vietnamese in the reign of Minh Mạng as formal political concepts and administrative units.¹¹⁸ Taking the Central Region, for instance, as Charles Wheeler points out, Minh Mạng first introduced the idea of the Central Region, or *Trung Kỳ*, as a formal political concept in his administrative reforms of the Vietnamese empire in the 1820s. The French carried forth this tripartite regional when they created *Tonkin*, *Annam*, and *Cochinchina* a few decades later. The idea of the Center precedes Minh Mạng, however. The Center's territorial precedents receded even further into the past and those conceptualizations were taken shape through history of territorial expansion. And at this point, Nola Cooke notes that *Trung Kỳ*, the Central region for instance, its territorial outlines also fit that of the kingdom of *Cochinchina*.¹¹⁹

Most of military construction, citadels, and roads during the early nineteenth century were significantly relied on geographical records and new cartography which as John Whitmore suggests, some of those new techniques both came from China and Europe.¹²⁰ The building of Gia Định citadel in 1789-1790 for example, thirty thousand people were employed under the instructing of western soldiers.¹²¹ The Map of Sài Gòn drawing in 1816 in western style by Trần Văn Học shows the citadel was placed in a perfect strategic position.¹²² Four decades later when it was captured by a small number of three thousand rebels, it took three years for 10,000 royal troops to

¹¹⁸ MMCY, Vol. 3, pp. 225-226

¹¹⁹ Charles Wheeler, The Case for Boats in Vietnamese History: Ship and the Social Flows that shapes Nguyễn Cochinchina (Central Vietnam), 16th-18th Centuries, MC

¹²⁰ John K. Whitmore, Cartography of Vietnam, p. 497

¹²¹ Frédéric Mantiene, The Transfer of Western Military Technology, pp. 519-534

¹²² Thai Van Kiem, "Interpretation d'une carte ancienne de Sài Gòn," Bulletin de la Société des Etudes Indochinoises, n.s., 37, no. 4 (1962): 409-31, esp. fig. 29.

regain and destroy in 1835.¹²³ On the other hand, geographical detailed surveys of Lê Quang Định, Trịnh Hoài Đức undoubtedly contributed to shape effective military and communicating networks throughout the country. Lê Quang Định between 1803 and 1806 measured the north-south main road [*đường Thiên Li*] from the northern border of Lạng Sơn to southern frontier of Hà Tiên. And then, long this length, the whole system was connected by communicating points [*dịch trạm*] and troops were set up to protect traffic and communication.¹²⁴ Nguyễn's chronicles report that between 1802 and 1844, eleven citadels were erected under the reign of Gia Long, twenty under Minh Mạng and one under Thiệu Trị. These new citadels formed a formidable network across the kingdom, stretching from north to south, from Cao Bằng to Hà Tiên.¹²⁵

Citadels built by the Nguyễn in early nineteenth century Vietnam

Location of the citadel	Design	Location of the citadel	Design
Sài Gòn (1790)	Square	Dinh Tuong (1824)	Unknown
Duyen Khanh (1793)	Unknown	Quang Yen (1827)	Unknown
Vinh (1803?), Thanh Hoa (1804)	Hexagonal	Nghe An (1831)	Unknown
Hue (1805)	Square	Hung Yen (1832)	Square
Bac Ninh (1805 earth, 1825 laterite, 1845 bricks)	Hexagonal	Nam Dinh (1833)	Square
Quang Ngai (1807)	Pentagonal	Ha Tinh (1833)	Square

¹²³ Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Khâm Định Tiểu Bình Bắc Kỳ Nghịch Phi Chính Biên*, 钦定剿平北圻逆匪正编 [Records of Subduing Bandits in Northern Vietnam], Volumes 26-27, trans. Version, Unpublished documents, (Hanoi: Viện sử học); Nguyễn Phan Quang, *Cuộc khởi binh Lê Văn Khôi ở Gia Định (1833-1835)* [Le Van Khai's Military Campaign in Gia Định, 1833-1835] (Hochiminh City: Nxb Thành Phố Hồ Chí Minh, 1991), pp. 62-76, 96

¹²⁴ QTCBTY, p. 98, HVNTDDC, pp. 14-18

¹²⁵ MMCY, Vol. 3, pp. 227-276, Nguyễn Phan Quang, *Việt Nam thế kỷ XIX (1802-1884)* [Vietnam in the nineteenth Century: 1802-1884], (Hochiminh City: Nxb Thành Phố Hồ Chí Minh, 2002)

Hai Duong (1807)	Pentagonal	Quang Nam (1833)	Unknown
Ha Tinh (earth, 1810?), Thai Nguyen (1813)	Square	An Giang (Chau Doc), Ha Tien, Lang Son (1834)	Unknown
Vinh Long (1813)	Hexagonal	Ha Noi (1835)	Square
Khanh Hoa (1814)	Unknown	Gia Định (Sài Gòn, rebuilt, 1836)	Square
Binh Dinh (1817)	Unknown	Phú Yên, Binh Thuan, Quang Tri (1837)	Unknown
Hung Hoa (1821)	Square	Bien Hoa (1838)	Unknown
Son Tay (1822)	Square	Tuyen Quang (1844)	Unknown
Quang Binh and Cao Bang (1824)	Unknown		

Source: Frédéric Mantiene, “The Transfer of Western Military Technology to Vietnam”, (2003), p. 526

Nguyễn Văn Siêu points out that from Gia Long to Minh Mạng, territory was reconfigured, the Central called Thừa Thiên Prefecture, the North and South called Nam Kỳ and Bắc Kỳ; taking *tỉnh* [province] to cover *phủ* [prefecture], *phủ* covers *huyện* [district], and *châu*; the system was clear.¹²⁶ Modern Vietnamese scholars describe Minh Mạng’s administrative reform as one of the most comprehensive and effective political organization in traditional Vietnam.¹²⁷ Woodside even suggests that Nguyễn controls local administrative units more effective than that of the Qing and in 1830, the Vietnamese court had more information and adaptation from the western cultures than that in the court of Qing.¹²⁸ It is a well-organized system in dealing with the significant increase in the number of districts from 178 to 283 between 1490 and 1847.¹²⁹ And the Nguyễn’s power was steadily maintained despite of the fact that

¹²⁶ PDDC, p. 18

¹²⁷ Văn Tao, *Mười cuộc cải cách, đổi mới trong lịch sử Việt Nam* [The Ten Reforms in Vietnamese History], (Hanoi: Nxb Đại học Sư phạm, 2006)

¹²⁸ Woodside, *Vietnam and Chinese Model*, p. 281

¹²⁹ Trương Quốc Dung, *Công Hạ Ký Văn*, 1: 80b, quoted in *ibid*, p. 23

there were four hundred rebellions during the next fifty years *vis-à-vis* continuous severe military challenges from Siamese.¹³⁰

Concluding Remarks

I would like to come back to Alexander Woodside's instruction in his classic work of the early nineteenth century Vietnam, the significance of political spatial consciousness: "Yet, nineteenth century Vietnam cannot be understood if it is not clearly remembered that the Vietnamese people had only recently expanded south, from present-day northern Vietnam. Gia Long (or perhaps accurately Minh Mạng) was the first Vietnamese emperor in history to rule the Mekong delta as well as the Red River delta",¹³¹ and the call for changing spatial approach to Vietnamese history made by Charles Wheeler, "We need new, humanistically grounded alternative for thinking about place and space in Vietnamese history".¹³² The changes in space of politics, economy, culture, and ethnicity were in larger scale and had a more significant impact than what has been demonstrated so far by current scholarship. It is also believed to be a key for a new understanding the quest of change in Vietnam on the edge of modernity. As for placing power of geography within the study of Vietnamese political economy, some of such classic questions may have been unfolded, why "reactionary" Nguyễn Ánh could defeat the "progressive" Tây Sơn; the Nguyễn kings could solidly maintain their throne in spite of four hundred rebellions in the next fifty years, why the loss of Cochinchina in 1867 was a watershed for the defeat of Vietnamese in the next three decades, and why the twentieth century Vietnamese strongly committed with another thirty-year "southward movement" in regaining an united political space.

My suggestion in this chapter may lead to a further point of how the idea of Vietnam as a nation state was introduced historically. This discourse is found as a key

¹³⁰ Nguyễn Phan Quang, *Phong trào nông dân và dân tộc miền núi dưới triều Nguyễn nửa đầu thế kỷ XIX* [Peasant and highland ethnicities' movements in the early nineteenth century Nguyễn Dynasty], (Ph.D dissertation, Đại học Sư phạm Hà Nội, 1996)

¹³¹ Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, p. 22-23

¹³² Charles Wheeler, Rethinking the Sea in Vietnamese History: Littoral Society in the Integration of Thuan Quang, Seventeenth-Eighteenth Centuries, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 37(1), February 2006, pp. 152

question for the twentieth century Vietnamese political history in which the competing narratives among various historical thoughts seem never ended and finally converged into two main directions. The first one argues that the Vietnamese national identity before the introduction of the western idea of modern nation state has not always fully appeared as a pattern although there was a special collective identity of some sort in traditional Vietnam.¹³³ The second direction, on the other hand, sees the strong and direct linkage between the modern Vietnamese nation state and the traditional political domain of the bamboo-walled villages.¹³⁴ This connection has been supported by most of the Vietnamese scholarship since the discussion was raised up during the 1960s. Many among those even traced back to thousand years ago, during the first step of the Viet's state formation, other see the Vietnamese history as a unique pattern in which at least three declarations of independence were introduced for over eight hundred years.* Without doubt, core of the explanation is found through the long Vietnamese struggle for their survival and for their identity. Craig A. Lockard suggests, "the long-term struggle for survival of the Vietnamese nation against tremendous odds (including conquest by foreigners and chronic internal discord) can best be explained by attributing to them a long entrenched proto-nationalism or national consciousness that later blossomed in their 20th century assertion of independence and resistance."¹³⁵ In fact, there was a large controversy among Vietnamese Marxist scholarship over the building ideology of nation state.

¹³³ Alexander B. Woodside, "Vietnamese History: Confucianism, Colonialism, and the Struggle for Independence", in David W P. Elliott et al, Vietnam: Essays on History, Culture and Society (New York: Asia Society, 1985), p. 5.

¹³⁴ See Phan Huy Lê, Tim Về Cội Nguồn [Looking for the Origins], 2 vols. (Hanoi: Thegioi, 1999), Phan Huy Lê, "Quá trình hình thành dân tộc và chủ nghĩa dân tộc trong lịch sử Việt Nam" [The Process of State formation and Introduction of Nationalism in Vietnamese History], Seminar of "Vấn đề dân tộc và Chủ nghĩa dân tộc ở Việt Nam cuối thế kỷ 19 đầu thế kỷ 20" [The discourse of nation and nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Vietnam], Organized by Vietnam National University, Hanoi and Japanese Ethno-Historical Museum, Hanoi: September, 10th, 2008, Truong Buu Lam, Patterns of Vietnamese response to Foreign Intervention: 1858-1900 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 31-32, Thomas Hodgkin, Vietnam: The Revolutionary Path (Macmillan: 1981), p. 5

* Those are Nam Quốc Sơn Hà (Mountain and River of the Southern Kingdom) [Lí Thường Kiệt (?), 1077], Bình Ngô Đại Cáo (Great announcement for the Victory over the Ming) [Nguyễn Trãi, 1428], Tuyên Ngôn Độc Lập (Declaration of Independence) [Hồ Chí Minh, 1945]

¹³⁵ Craig A. Lockard, 'The unexplained miracle: Reflections on Vietnamese national identity and survival', Journal of Asian and African Studies, 29, 1-2 (1994): 10. Also see more on this discussion on Liam C. Kelley, Vietnam as a "Domain of Manifest Civility" (Văn Hiến Chi Bang), Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, Vol. 34, No. 1, Feb., 2003, pp. 63-64

Two main tendencies had raised, as a result, the Stalin's concept of nation state which is characterized by four factors of language, boundary, economic nature, and culture and the view that the Vietnamese has their idea of nation since the beginning of historical making. In my view, those notions have kept Vietnamese scholarship in ambiguities for decades because the former is better fitted with western patterns and the later shows the significant misunderstanding between the concept of "ethnicity" and "nation" which in Vietnamese are both employed by the same word, "*dân tộc*".

This multi-decade scholarly implication can be illuminated from the historical development of early nineteenth century Vietnam. Within the context of traditional Southeast Asia, it can be said that Vietnamese is among the leadings that soon gave up the focus on management of the people or control "lived space"* only and practiced an advanced political philosophy and effective administrative system in which factors of modern politics have been gradually generated. In the other words, Vietnamese political organization has moved from kingdom based on single ethnicity into kingdom based on political space or boundary with multi-ethnicities within. This discourse will academically fit the gap between all kinds of western thematic models of political structure, including Benedict Anderson's Imagined community, and Thongchai's "geobody" and historical facts of nineteenth century Vietnam.¹³⁶

It is possible to argue that the idea of politics of space in the early nineteenth century Đại Nam is part of the "national consciousness" although it is quite early to demonstrate the political phenomenon in a form of a national structure. David Chandler once employed the terms of "pre-colonial Imperialism" and "pre-nationalist Response" to show the political integration between Đại Nam and Cambodia.¹³⁷ By this mean, it is likely found that the coming of the western colonialism as a watershed to mark a frontier between modern national state and traditional political structure. In

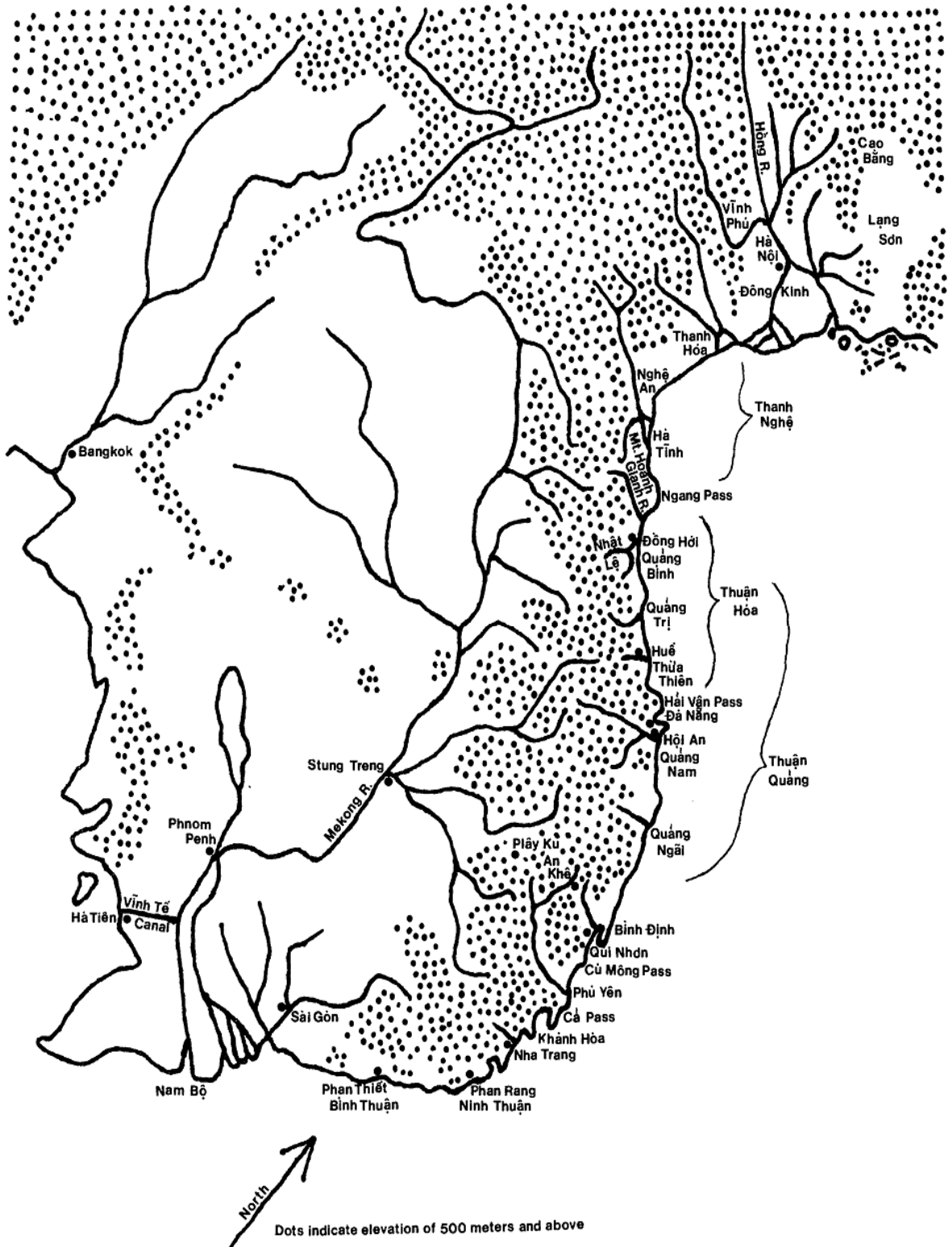
* Term used by Ian Harris; Ian Harris, Rethinking Cambodian political discourse on territory: Genealogy the Buddhist ritual boundary (sima), *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 41(2) June 2010, p. 224

¹³⁶ See Phan Huy Lê, "Quá trình hình thành dân tộc và chủ nghĩa dân tộc trong lịch sử Việt Nam" (2008)

¹³⁷ David Chandler, An Anti-Vietnamese Rebellion in Early Nineteenth Century Cambodia: Pre-Colonial Imperialism and a Pre-Nationalist Response, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Mar., 1975), pp. 16-24

case of Đại Nam, early nineteenth century witnessed the transformation of the political philosophy and power practice over a vast territory which then became the modern Vietnam. The process took root from hundred years of political and territorial evolution and came as a result of a natural evolution. The Vietnamese first differentiated themselves and others ethnically, culturally, economically, and politically. They then have experience of the consciousness of space, certain part of the geographical surface they got familiar and utilize as a landscape of their activities. Early nineteenth century Vietnamese then transformed their perception of those spaces with the notions of sovereignty and territory. All those evolutions came long before the Vietnamese had knowledge of the Westphalia Agreements, before the French Indochina, and at the very moment they were being on their way to create a new political institution at the edge of modernity.*

* Regarding to this respect, Geoff Wade recently describes the revival of a hierarchy in mainland Asia, a phenomenon which some may perceive as a rejection of the relevance of the Westphalian system to Asia. Geoff Wade, ASEAN Divides, (online) <http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala> (accessed October 23, 2011). Also see recent paper of Ian Harris in which, it “aims to gently challenge Thongchai Winichakul’s view that the construction of a modern Southeast Asian state’s geo-body is purely the result of adventurist factors such as the importation of colonialist geographical and political categories and their practical applications, such as land surveying and map-making.”, Ian Harris, Rethinking Cambodian political discourse on territory: Genealogy the Buddhist ritual boundary (sima), Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, 41(2) June 2010, p. 219



Eighteenth Century Vietnam
Courtesy of Keith Taylor, Surface Orientation (1998)



Vietnam in the early 19th century

Source: Công cuộc Nam Tiến của dân tộc Việt Nam, p. 309

CHAPTER IV

THE MEKONG VALLEY

A SPACE OF STATE-MAKING

This chapter explores the way centralized state-making conquered the space of the Mekong valley. Its main aim is to re-construct the transformation of the political landscape in the region through the impacts of Siamese and Vietnamese centralized expansion in the early nineteenth century, particularly during the time of Rama III and Minh Mạng. Both states utilize geographies of knowledge to extend infrastructure of state-building and establish new politico-economic institution into complex terrain and autonomous marginal space. My argument is that the Mekong basin of the eighteenth century margins and ambiguous political identification was administratively turned into “territory” of the early nineteenth century centralized state. As a result, state-making project fundamentally transformed political structure of the region. Unlike in the eighteenth century when state moved toward people and economic centers, early nineteenth century witnessed various forms of which peoples voluntarily or forced to move along with state establishment. Centers had been mapped and state administrative network paved the way for reorganizing political structure of the region which was paralleled to inspire by both Siamese and Vietnamese nation-building. By looking at the Siamese and Vietnamese expansion along the Mekong basin, not from the perspective of confrontation, but in the context of power transformation throughout the basin, a convergence between them has been drawn. That is the extensive expansion of state into mountain, hill, and swamp by creating canal, route, military fortresses, collecting immigrants at the frontier to set up settlement and administrative network. The state conquest into periphery and semi-periphery was seen of unparalleled scale and posed fundamental transformation from “periphery” into “geobody” of central state.

Considering the Mekong Valley as a space of political transformation, the analysis starts with Siamese and Vietnamese advancement in a new level of centralization by structurally re-configuring their political organization and administrative network toward smaller principalities along the River. It is important to realize that conventional scholarship on the mainland seems to recognize the Annam Ranges as not only a physical frontier but cultural, religious and political ideological mark between the Theravada World of Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia and the *Sinicization* of Vietnam. Thus, most of the scholarship apparently draws a clear distinction toward the two sides of the mountain. However, in term of political transformation, no such differentiation can be seen, regardless to the different employment of local concept and religion. One of the dominant features of this movement needs to be mentioned here is the territorialization of space. Đại Nam and Siam of course played as main actor of this phenomenon. At the same time, it is found interesting enough that the Vietnamese and Siamese brought their ideas to the mountain and complex terrain where local peoples started adapting and practicing the politics of centralization. In other words, state in the making, not only conquered space of “*Zomia*” but also various forms of complex natural landscape and marginal zone where it introduced new infrastructures, facilities and even a *lingua franca*. The process therefore did not simply involve with core-state center of Bangkok, Hue and Sài Gòn but, at large had a fundamental impact on groups at the frontier and periphery of traditional states, those people who were in long consideration of outsider. Traditional power network along the Mekong was reconstructed and those groups were no longer at the marginal of the political map but had a critical role to involve with the creation of early nation. The change was not limited itself within the Siamese, Vietnamese or Burmese, but was seen worldwide as a regional trend, including the buffer space of *muang* Laos and Khmer polity.

One of the intriguing features of this development also dealt with the reconstructed space under the state making. This comes from the fact that at least three main powers in the Mekong region using peripheries as bases in confronting for the throne, Taksin of Thonburi, Nguyễn Ánh (Ong Chiang Su, in Thai), and Chakri of Bangkok. All the successful campaigns they had made came from “periphery” to

regain the “center”, therefore, they presented an unique perspective for the need of incorporating such margins into core-state as an equally important administrative and territorial unit. From the Siamese and Vietnamese perspective, the Mekong valley is an integrated political space and in the age of state-making, it was a space of conquerableness.

The spatial clash between Siam and Đại Nam in the early nineteenth century brought enormous geopolitical establishment by leaving a firming of boundaries to the approaching era of European colonialism. By marking a clear distinction between the “old Siam” and “new Siam”, between the traditional Vietnam and colonial Vietnam through the Bowring Treaty and the coming of French invasion during the 1850s, modern historiography is likely elusive or unintentionally ignored this period of transformation. This gap is crucial for understanding early form of Siamese and Vietnamese active response to the quest of modernity by improving their political management in space.

Interestingly, previous scholarship on early nineteenth century Mekong region tries to draw relationship between Siam and Đại Nam from very modern Thai and Vietnamese perspective. As a result, regular convention deals with political confrontation, economic competition, and religious expansion as driving forces. This chapter shall not look at Siam and Dai Nam from the conflicting perspective, but brings together into a sharing geopolitical agenda of the Mekong valley. And in the time of sharing political evolution in which state-making used power of geography, cartography to move beyond complex terrains, conquer and reorganize space with state infrastructure. The phenomenon takes shape modern contours of the mainland Southeast Asia at the edge of colonialism.

Research in the last decades shows the economic integrity of the Mekong valley during the early modern history. Several economic networks stretched from the northern mainland to the Lower Mekong River delta in the south.¹ This economic

¹ Chiranan Prasertkul, Yunnan trade in the nineteenth century: Southwest China's cross-boundaries functional system, (Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1989), Puangthong Ruangwasdisab, War and Trade: Siamese Intervention in Cambodia, 1767-1851, Ph.D dissertation, University of Wollongong, 1995, Li Tana and Nola Cooke, eds., Water Frontier, (Rowman & Littlefield publishers, INC, 2004), Victor Lieberman, Strange Parallels, Vol. 1, (MA: Cambridge University Press, 2003), Andrew Walker, The legend of the golden boat: regulation, trade and traders

landscape of the nineteenth century mainland, however, poses the quest of reconstructing the dialectical correlation with political landscape in which such economic interaction was generated. By sharpening the tools of historical analysis, it is realized that there is a convergence of view of scholarship relating to political history of the mainland Southeast Asia in pre-modern time, either from outside perspective or localization agency. The dominant feature is that such pattern of political structure is till overwhelmingly captured by the very traditional perspective, particularly to the narrative of Siam and Vietnam. Conventional model of politics and power under influence of religious philosophy, notably the Buddhist *cakkavatin* and the Sino-Vietnamese tributary system, nonetheless, seem not to show a strong comprehensive justification for neither the scale of political development in the early nineteenth century nor power organization in shaping geopolitics in the Mekong space before the French Indochina.

As a result, scholarship on the Mekong valley regularly acknowledges a contrast between the political ideology of the Theravada kingdom of Siam on the one hand and the Sinicized Vietnam on the other. Differences of diplomatic worldview, economic ambition, and political expansion are described as *de facto* motor of Rama III and Minh Mạng's foreign policy toward the Mekong basin. Sunait Chutintaranond has conducted numerous research on premodern Siamese-Burmese warfare in general and on the idea of *cakravartin* in particular. He points out that the *cakravartin* concept functioned as an ideological motivation of Siamese and Burmese kings in traditional warfare. In reality, the kings created within their imaginary *Jambudipa* the realm of their own *mandala* or "field of power", in which they contended to become the most powerful Buddhist king. However, their *madalas* never overlapped until the first half of the 16th century, after the old Mon kingdom was totally incorporated as part of the Burmese political domain and after the interior capital, Toungoo, was abandoned and replaced by Pegu, who also wanted to control over the trans-peninsular traffic with the Gulf of Siam.² In cases of Tai-Lao and Tai-Khmer relation, sometimes the recognition

in the borderlands of Laos, Thailand, Burma and China (Surrey: Curzon Press; Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999)

² Sunait Chutintaranond. Cakravartin: the Ideology of Traditional Warfare in Siam and Burma, 1548-1605, Ph. D dissertation, Ithaca: Cornell University, 1990, idem, On both sides of the Tenasserim

is not limited within the context of mandalas or tributary relation. The Thai-Lao close kinship and the protection of Buddhism to against Vietnamese destruction in Cambodia sometimes were used by Bangkok to signify presence of Siamese power in the Mekong valley.³

The Vietnamese on the other hand, describes the westward movement under the characteristics of “*mission civilisatrice*”. A Hue’s official explained the Vietnamese campaign in Cambodia that “from the creation of the earth onwards, only now has our Southern Country become extensive, something our dynasty has achieved beneath the southern skies. The land of Cao Man (Cambodia) is not broken up by mountains and unhealthy air; it is flat and fertile, flourishing and rich, located to the west of our country, and bordered by our Lục Tỉnh (southern Vietnam). All this [occurs] because Heaven cannot bear that it should be a barbarian desert. Now that our country is changing things in a significant way and registering [Khmer] households, the day of transforming old customs into Hoa/Hán [Vietnamese] has come.”⁴

However, political landscape of the early nineteenth century Mekong presents considerable level of state expansion in which such explanations are in the need of more illustrations. The “field of power” was extended to the marginal zone of the Mekong basin. State administration crossed swamp and climbed up mountain in setting. In this context, the gap of knowledge between our understanding economic nature and political landscape provides challenge to have a comprehensive view of the Mekong as a united economic and political subject. The time of early nineteenth century is also critical. Ruling at the eve of colonialism in the mainland, Rama III (1824-1851) and Minh Mạng (1820-1841) are conventionally acknowledged as the last and great traditional kings of Siam and Đại Nam. However, as mentioned earlier, it is likely that their time should be better addressed the context of transition rather to merely belong to the traditional framework. Relocating this angle of vision, it is

Range: History of Siamese Burmese Relations, (Bangkok : Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1995)

³ David Chandler, “Cambodia Before the French: Politics in a Tributary Kingdom, 1794–1848”, (PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1974)

⁴ “Tran Tay phong tho ky”, pp. 155-56

hoped to enrich scholarly understanding of changing in the mainland, from premodern to early modern history.

The significance of those suggestions is that they encourage scholarship to go beyond colonial and national historiographies and present a new way to narrate Siam and Dai Nam political transition, as well as to deal with their interaction in the context of two parallel state-making project. This approach is expected to shed light upon a wide range of political transformation in the early modern Mekong valley which concepts and patterns of traditional Southern Asian politics are unlikely covered.⁵

4. 1. Mekong Valley in the Quest of Centralization

The year is 1757, the Konbaung troops led by Alaungpaya entered Lower Burma where the Restored Hanthawaddy, last Mon kingdom was extinguished.⁶ Following the annexation of the Lower Irrawaddy, in 1785, Thado Minsaw, the crown prince and eldest son of king Bodawpaya took 30,000 men cross the Arakan Yoma Mountains. The small kingdom of Arakan was captured, annexed outright as a “kingdom held by arms” (*lethenet naingngan*), and then divided into four governorships, each backed by a garrison of permanent military occupation. The Shweidaung Price brought back with him the great Maha Muni image, symbol of Arakanese sovereignty, together with 20,000 captives to populate his father’s new capital of Amarapura, the “Immortal City”.⁷ The event placed one thousand year lasting of the Arakan kingdom came to an end. In 1813, the Burmese moved their forward bases up the Chindwin into the adjacent Kabaw valley, and from those, the final conquest of the Manipur valley was launched in 1819. As a result, a permanent garrison was stationed, backed by a long supply line up the Chindwin River. Two year later, the next target of the Konbaung was Assam where its kings in the capital of Rangamati, ruled over the Brahmaputra valley, from the descent of the great river in

⁵ Craig J. Reynolds, “Paradigms of the Premodern State”, in *Seditious Histories: Contesting Thailand Southeast Asian Pasts* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press and Singapore: Singapore University press, 2004), pp. 31-52

⁶ Guillon, Emmanuel, *The Mons: a civilization of Southeast Asia*, translated and edited by James V. Di Crocco (Bangkok: Siam Society under Royal Patronage, 1999); Thant Myint-U, *The River of Lost Footsteps--Histories of Burma* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006)

⁷ Than Myint-U, *The Making of modern Burma*, (Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 14

south-eastern Tibet to its entry into the plains of Bengal. In 1823, the Burmese troops established their forward base at Rangpur and extinguished the Ahom court.⁸

For several decades of busting and reshaping political landscape, the mainland saw the last stand of several small principalities and groups locating at the frontier of main powers. The destiny of the Mon kingdom was not unique and the Mon was not definitely alone in the struggle against being incorporated by neighboring state building. The survival of Lao *muang* in the central Mekong, minority zone in northwestern Dai Nam, ruin of the Cham kingdom in Pahnduranga, and the Khmer polity was challenged by the same force of Hue and Bangkok's centralized expansion. For the history of peoples living in between states in the mainland, such kind of events suggest that the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries were truly milestone for the last autonomous stand before being governed into a bigger and more complex political system.

Rapidly changing political landscape in the Mekong basin is the product of new burst energy coming from a various array of forces economically and politically. As Alexander Woodside suggests that “for comparative historians, Southeast Asia is the world’ foremost historical laboratory for discovering how economic change drove intellectual evolution”.⁹ In the early nineteenth century, what comes cross clearly from the source is that centralized expansion presented the cumulative motors of mobilized population, demographic influx, economic burst and connection of the mainland with international market via the coming of western power.

The rise of Siamese during the Thonburi and early Bangkok, and Nguyễn Ánh in the Lower Mekong undoubtedly reveals the power of global market and maritime trade.¹⁰ As Anderson puts it, “everywhere centralization was accelerating as a result

⁸ Than, *The Making of Modern Burma*, pp. 15-6; Gangamumei Kabui, *History of Manipur*, Vol. I: Pre-Colonial Period, New Delhi, 1991, pp. 194 – 291

⁹ Alexander Woodside, *The Relationship between Political Theory and Economic Growth in Vietnam, 1750-1840*, in Anthony Reid, ed., *The Last Stand of Asian Autonomies* (London: Macmillan, 1997), p. 247

¹⁰ See Cushman, J. Wayne, *Siamese State Trade and the Chinese Go-between, 1767-1855*, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia (Mar., 1981), pp. 46-61, idem, *Fields from the Seas: Chinese Junk Trade with Siam during the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries*, Studies on Southeast Asia No. 2. (Ithaca, N. Y: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1993); Viraphol, Sarasin, *Tributary and Profit: Sino-Siamese Trade, 1652-1853*, (Cambridge, Harvard East Asian monographs No. 76- 1977; Tana, Li, *Nguyễn Cochinchina: Southern*

of the demands made by, and the opportunities derived from, the expanding global capitalism”.¹¹ The burgeoning demand from the South China Sea market, especially the rise of Batavia, Malaya, Singapore and southern Chinese coasts strengthened the linkage between Siam and Dai Nam with international trade where their products such as salted fish, rice, pepper, salt, sugar, and forest product were indispensable. The centralized state perspective of the southwest Indochina may not be fully understood if one is not clearly aware that rice exports had constituted more than 70% of total export in the region during the nineteenth century.¹² Chao Phraya and Mekong valley gradually became the regional “rice bowl”. The emergence of rice trade, in part, helped to promote the economic coherence in southwest Indochina, and also its role on the Asian markets. Consequently, as observed by Crawford, rice became the “source of the most extensive branch” of Vietnam’s internal trade.¹³ A report in 1768 by Lê Quý Đôn suggested that Nguyễn government had levied 341 boats to bring rice from the Mekong Delta to Thuận Hóa, the capital area.¹⁴ This tendency even emerged greatly during the early nineteenth century, when two thousand junks were engaged in transportation between Sài Gòn and Hue. In Siam, king Taksin in his early days tried to connect some six economic centers of Phisanulok, Sawankalok, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Phimai, Ayutthaya and Chantaburi by new overland and riverine routes. *Pharatchaphonsawadan chabap phrarachahattalekha* [Royal chronicle, Royal autograph edition] states that as a ruler of Thonburi, Taksin brought rice from ships coming from Pontameas/ Hà Tiên at the height cost of 3 to 5 baht per *thang* to distribute to the people for they had not yet settled down to cultivation.¹⁵

Vietnam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries (Ithaca, N. Y: Cornell University Press, 1998); Tana, Li, An Alternative Vietnam? The Nguyễn Kingdom in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Mar., 1998), pp. 111-121; Choi Byung Wook, Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng (1820-1841): Central Policies and Local Response, (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University, SEAP, 2004); Hong, Lysa, Thailand in the nineteenth century: Evolution of the Economy and Society, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1984); Hans-Dieter Evers, “Trade and State Formation: Siam in the Early Bangkok Period”, Modern Asian Studies, 21, 4 (1987), pp. 751-771

¹¹ See Benedict Anderson, “Studies of the Thai State”, paper submitted to the conference on The State of Thai Studies, Chicago, March 30, 1978, p. 26

¹² Yoko Takada, “The Rice Exports and the Colonial Tariff Policy of the French Indochina”, in Thailand and Her Neighbors(II): Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia (Bangkok: Thammasat University Press, 1994), pp. 60-82

¹³ Crawford, Journal of An Embassy, p. 511; Li Tana, Nguyễn Cochinchina, pp. 144-48;

¹⁴ PBT, p. 187

¹⁵ Hong Lysa. Thailand in the Nineteenth Century, p. 40

New source of economic dynamism came from Chinese rice trade, in the age of “Chinese century” 1740-1840.¹⁶ In the end of eighteenth century, the Qing China encouraged private Chinese traders to import rice in their own account as well. And they, of course looked south, toward southwest Indochina where rice supply was believed to be unlimited. In Siam only, by the 1750s, Fujian merchants were importing at least 6,000 - 8,000 tons a year but was separate from imports by Guangdong and Zhejiang merchants and presumably from tributary trade. In all, annual Siamese rice exports to China from 1740-1765 must have averaged well over 10,000 tons, and the number could reach to 40,000 tons sometimes in the early nineteenth century.¹⁷ This is partly why many suggested that there was an economic boom in southwest Indochina early nineteenth century. In 1825, there were 256 junks visited Bangkok, which had replaced Batavia as the busiest Southeast Asian port.¹⁸

The same trend was also introduced in Sài Gòn. Without doubt, the emergence of the city accompanied with the rise of rice trade. A western report in 1800s informed that there were 300 junks visited Sài Gòn annually meanwhile in 1800 the revenue from overseas trade in the city alone was 489,790 quan [in comparison with state revenue of Nguyễn Lord was between 338,100 to 423,300 during 1746-1752].¹⁹ And this is most likely related to the rice exportation from the Mekong delta. The volume of rice trade was fundamental for Vietnamese economy and continuously increased in the first half of nineteenth century. Crawford suggested that in 1823, the amount of export from Vietnam to China was roughly 20,000 tons and the number reached to 127,000 tons in 1866. For Singapore, volume of exportation from Vietnam was reported around 31,000 tons in 1857.²⁰ The diagram below illustrates the

¹⁶ Anthony Reid, “The Last Stand of Asian Autonomies”, pp. 11-14; Idem, “Chinese Trade and Southeast Asia economic expansion in the Late Eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: An Overview”, in Water Frontier, pp. 21-35

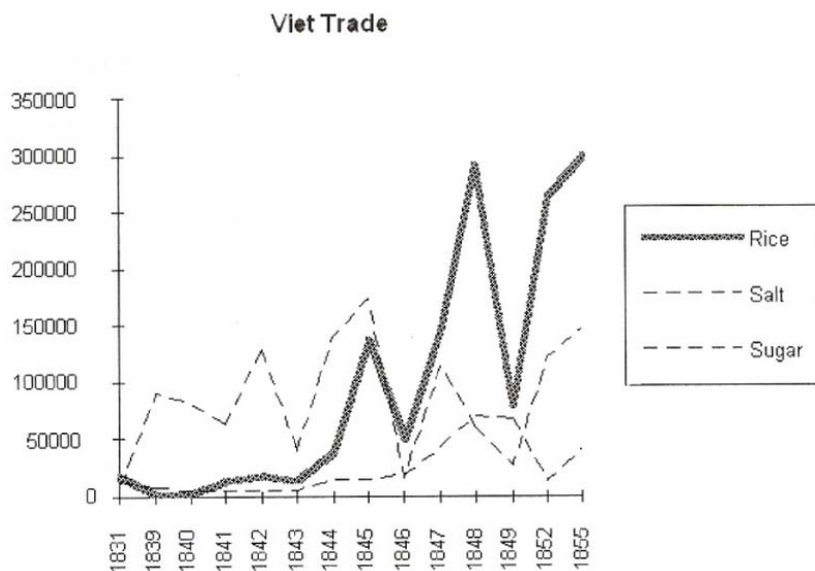
¹⁷ Lieberman, Strange Parallels, vol. 1, p. 290

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 304

¹⁹ See Li Tana, Rice Trade in the 18th and 19th Century Mekong Delta and its Implication, in Thailand and Her Neighbors (II): Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia (Bangkok: Thammasat University, 1994), p. 205

²⁰ Li Tana, Ngoại thương của Việt Nam thế kỷ XIX: Quan hệ với Singapore [Vietnamese Foreign Trade in the Nineteenth Century: A Relation with Singapore] in Proceedings of the First International Conference in Vietnamese Studies, Hanoi, 1998, pp. 141-150

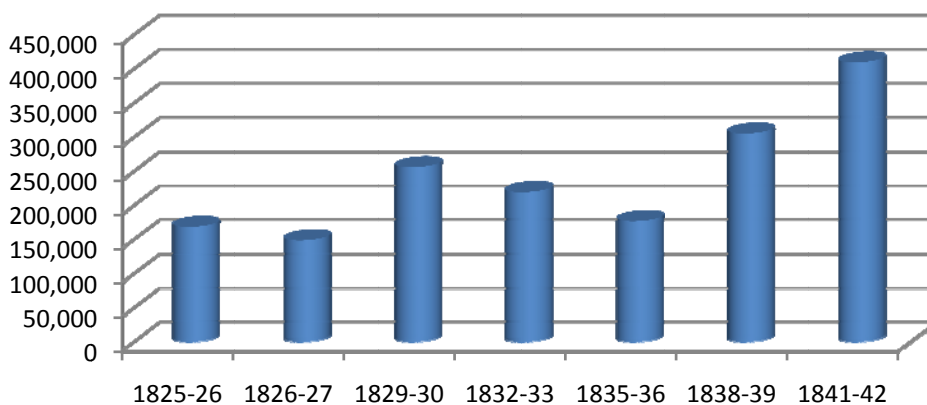
Vietnamese export volume of rice, salt, and sugar to Singapore between 1831 and 1855.



Vietnamese Export Volume of Rice, Salt, and Sugar to Singapore, 1831-1855 [tons]

Source: Li Tana, *Ngoại thương của Việt Nam thế kỷ XIX: Quan hệ với Singapore* [Vietnamese Foreign Trade in the Nineteenth Century: A Relation with Singapore] in Proceedings of the First International Conference in Vietnamese Studies, Hanoi, 1998, pp. 141-150

Siamese Export Volume to Singapore, 1825-1842, [Spanish Dollars]



Source: D. R. Sar Desai, *British Trade and Expansion in Southeast Asia*, (New Delhi: Allied Publishers Private Limited, 1977), p. 80

In addition, both Siamese and Vietnamese economies were becoming increasingly dependent on upland trading resources along the center and upper

Mekong. Such kinds of commodity were transferred through many riverine exchange networks in Khorat, Champassak, Tonle Sap, and along the Annam Ranges to the plain economic centers in Chao Phraya and Vietnamese coasts.²¹

Singaporean Trade with Mainland Southeast Asia, 1825-1865			
Percentage of Total (\$ in millions)			
	1825 (%) Percentage of Total	1845 (%) Percentage of Total	1865 (%) Percentage of Total
Burma	-	11	33
Cambodia	-	-	2
Cochin-China	21	46	23
Thailand	79	42	42
Total	\$ 0.7	\$ 1.0	\$ 8.7

Source: Wong Linken, “Singapore: Its Growth as an Entrepot Port, 1819-1941, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, No. 9, 1978, p. 55

Therefore, the control of economic resources in the Mekong basin was vital for both Siam and Dai Nam to maintain power and effective competition. Not surprisingly, it is easy to figure out the economic motor behind Siamese and Vietnamese political expansion through control trade, collecting tax, and manpower. Building public works, capital, and warfare required a great number of labors. For all of these reasons, state centralization offered Siam and Dai Nam a strong ability to effectively manage their economic network and utilize those sources to advance its political organization. On the other hand, economic expansion can be acknowledged as a source for social and political change. As Nidhi Eoseewong suggests about new bourgeois culture emerged during the early Rattanakosin period where he finds “a new and vigorous spirit of experimenting with new techniques, and new motifs, new verse forms, and new idea” without massive western impacts like after 1855.²² The

²¹ See Hickey Gerald Cannon, *Sons of the Mountains, Ethnohistory of the Vietnamese central highlands to 1954*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); Andrew Walker, *The Legend of the Golden Boat* (1999); Li Tana, Between Mountains and the Sea: Trades in Early Nineteenth-Century Northern Vietnam, *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Summer 2012), pp. 67-86

²² See Nidhi Eoseewong, *Prawatsat Rattanakosin nai phraratchaphongsawadan Ayutthaya* [Bangkok History in Ayutthaya Chronicles] (Bangkok: Bannakit, 1978), and *Pak kai Lae Rua: Ruan Khwam Riang Wa Duai Wannakam lae Prawatisat Ton Rattanakosin* [Pen and Sail: Collected essays on early Bangkok Literature and History] (Bangkok: Amarin, 1984); Nidhi Eoseewong, “The Early Bangkok period: Literature change and its Social causes”, *ASR*, Vol. 18, No. 1(July 1994), pp. 69-76,

appearance of complex economic system in return was required an advanced political management which strengthening centralization would be found as an ultimate choice.

Warfare and transfer western military technology is other essential factors contribute to the burgeoning centralization of state. The nature of power in the mainland suggests that potential war and conflict can be a dynamic source for reconstructing political organization of state. Many great powers came after the administrative collapse and destructive authority. The Burmese power cyclicality between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries and that of Vietnam during the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries reveal the development of centralization in time and space. Nineteenth century Mekong however offered a very unique political landscape in which the clash between two main players had crucial impact on testing political identification over the most parts of the region. As Tarling observes, “loyalties at the peripheral areas were less secure than elsewhere, though during the period under survey they were drawn closer to the main centers of power than at any other time before”.²³ As a result, warfare became an effective way to collect various groups at overlapping zone and margin under the center authority.

Scholars of the 1970s and 1980s were very much interested in defining the Vietnamese political model from Chinese perspective. Alexander Woodside, Tsuboi, Yu Insun imply that a Chinese-style of tributary model was the institution the Nguyễn tried to practice during their first three kings. The assumption however is possibly in question if one looks closer to the competition between the Vietnamese and the Siamese. The concomitant expansion of territorial frontier, administrative control, and economic management was unprecedented. The state system correspondingly was expected to be more flexible, pragmatic, and having a profound knowledge of peoples locating outside cultural and ethnic frontier. That feature is likely not familiar in the traditional Chinese cultural politics where there was no consistent care about peoples

and *Pen and Sail: literature and history in early Bangkok including the history of Bangkok in the chronicles of Ayutthaya* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2005)

²³ Nicolas Tarling, ed., *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, vol. 1, p. 573

on the other side of the ethnic and cultural frontier. Recently, Choi Byung Wook suggests that the model was given up by the Nguyễn engaging more with pragmatic foreign policy, especially in cases of Minh Mạng and Lê Văn Duyệt.²⁴ By the late eighteenth century, the Vietnamese southward movement finally came to an end when they faced the sea. As a result, it quickly turned into a new discourse which nationalist historiography is rarely in touch, “moving to the west” (*tây tiến*). Both Woodside and Chandler have mentioned about this foreshadower in their works, “The advent of the Nguyễn Dynasty meant, among other things, that Cambodia’s eastern flank was occupied by a unified, powerful state, pressing west and south to bring additional people and rice-land under its control and into its cultural orbit”.²⁵

The successes of incorporating the Lower Mekong into Vietnamese political domain of course could become a source of motivation for the Nguyễn to go further west and approaching the southwest Indochina, where it met another project of “moving east ward”, the Siamese. The expansion of Siam in time of Chao Phraya Taksin was beyond efforts of any Thai rulers before.²⁶ As a result, extended territory required a new political institution to govern effectively and first kings of the early Rattanakosin maintained well the system, even expanded further as during the reign of king Rama III when most of the Mekong basin was put under the management of state power. The quest of centralization also comes from changing state management of land and manpower. There are evidences showing that state which rely on controlling man were placed by one based on managing both people and territory. When geopolitics was expanded, both Siam and Dai Nam were in the need to convert their political system into more effective and flexible, especially setting authority over the zone of various ethnicities and cultures. The 1827 Siamese assault in Laos and the Vietnamese conquest in Cambodia during the 1830s show challenge both had to face to establish central control over the new territorial space.²⁷ In addition, administrative network was expected to be effective enough to collect peoples in the periphery and resettle them along new state infrastructure and from which new administrative units would come out.

²⁴ Choi Byung Wook, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng*, (2004)

²⁵ Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, p. 247

²⁶ David K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A short History* (1982), p. 13

²⁷ See David Chandler, *An Anti-Vietnam* (1975); *Tran Tay Phong Tho Ky*, (2007)

The coming of European power at the frontier of Siam and Dai Nam in the 1820s contributes another political impact on the quest of centralization over the Mekong valley. The British made wars with Burma was partly and primarily resulted from the Konbaung's centralized state making project. It was found as one of reasons led to the first Anglo-Burmese war as in 1823 when the Burmese general, Thado Maha Bandula after conquering Assam actually had forayed into Cachar, Jaintia, and planed of marching to Bhutan.²⁸ The failure of Burmese is a lesson for both Siamese and Vietnamese who would look at the war cautiously. Later on, the clash with westerners came to Siam as the British Malaya was established.²⁹ And then, the British sent its officials to Bangkok concerning to borders with Burma. As Thongchai illuminates in his book, it is the first time the Siamese traditional ideology of "border", and "frontier" collided with those of modern western nation.³⁰ Apart from this, the introduction of modern geography and cartography by western missionaries to Siamese royal intellectuals, took part in transforming Siamese political ideology.³¹ The establishment of the British Malaya gradually brought another trouble to Bangkok, especially during the time of Rama III. With the western support, some Malay polities tried to break out from Siamese traditional dependence. This attempt then was part Bangkok's main concerns and king Rama III had repeatedly sent troops to suppress the local Malay resistance.³²

It is obvious that both Siam and Dai Nam were increasingly feeling the threats from western ambition. During the first half of the nineteenth century, they would be successful in keeping European merchant, missionary, and troop at the arm's length but so much attention and dedication had been paid in establishing political control over alien population, managing vast economic network, and dealing with local resistance in various forms.³³ All of these tasks are more or less to answer for the

²⁸ S. L. Baruah, *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, (New Delhi, 1985), pp. 361-8

²⁹ See Corfield, *Justin, Rama III and the Siamese Expedition to Kedah in 1839: The Dispatches of Luang Udomsombat*, translated by Cyril Skinner. Monash Papers on Southeast Asia – No. 30, Clayton, Victoria 3168 (Central for Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1993); Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya, *A history of Malaysia* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001)

³⁰ Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped*, pp. 62-80

³¹ *Ibid.* pp. 37-61

³² Watler F. Vella, *Siam Under Rama III*, pp. 59-77

³³ Charles Wheeler, *Cross-cultural Trade and Trans-regional Networks*, p. 34

quest of centralization and effective political management over space, until the western power became irresistible and new challenge presented itself. On his deathbed, it is reported that king Rama III remarked to Phraya Si Suriyangwong (Chuang):

“There will be no more wars with Vietnam and Burma. We will have them only with the west. Take care, and do not lose any opportunities to them. Anything they propose should be help up to close scrutiny before accepting it: Do not blindly trust them”.³⁴

Political change is not only the agenda of the main powers, but for smaller groups of people who on the other hand playing as victim of humiliation and loss brought by shrinking borders and the perpetual insecurity of buffer politics. The clash between Vietnamese and Khmer for instance, can be taken as origin for some source of proto-nationalism. David Chandler suggests that, “The ‘non-Vienamese’ of Cambodians – which in the nineteenth century took a wide variety of forms – has been treated by many Cambodians as an essential part of Khmer identity. Vietnamese differed sharply from Cambodians in language, dress, organized religion, architecture, literature, folk-lore, social structure, currency, table-manners, calligraphy and coiffures – to name only a few – even though some of these differences were blurred somewhat in border regions. Because of this, it is useful to see the 1820s and 1830s, when Vietnam’ assault on Cambodia was systematic and intense, as a watershed in the development of one aspect of Cambodian nationalism.”³⁵ There was also transfer of political knowledge and technique from Siam and Dai Nam into Laos and Cambodia those who were trying to adapt this advancement of centralization and improve their vassal status. Perpetual effort of Chau A Nu to reunite *muang* Laos and integrate Khorat Plateau on the Mekong western bank can be seen as another centralized project. It is likely clear that Chau A Nu intentionally made use of the political transformation in the Mekong valley and played a power game between Siam

³⁴ Chaophraya Thiphakorawong, Phraratchaphongsawadan Krung Rattanakoin ratchakan thi 3 (The Bangkok Chronicle of the Third Reign), Bangkok, 1967, Vol. 2, pp. 187-88

³⁵ David Chandler, An Anti-Vietnamese Rebellion, p. 20

and Dai Nam in order to invite Hue's involvement into his political project.³⁶ Among other muang in the central Mekong, it is interesting enough that some started learning Vietnamese technique of controlling manpower and land through conducting cadastral survey and population registration.³⁷ Therefore, centralization is not the monopoly of the main state power and the smaller should not be merely considered as victim of centralized expansion. They actively responded to it by changing, by adapting new political organization and by being more centralized. Cambodia during the reign of king Duang is another good example in response to the quest of survival in the mid-nineteenth century Mekong.

4. 2. Space of Ignorance, Space of Knowledge, and Space of Conquerableness

To conquer space, the capacity to understand its natural, social and economic landscape is vital for state. Siamese and Vietnamese state making projects were significantly facilitated by new geographies and cartography. Large number of geographical records presented the Vietnamese increased concern and their profound knowledge of the region. The introduction of *Đại Nam Nhất Thống Toàn Đồ* (Completed map of Great South, 1838) described the Huế's attempt to integrate Cambodia and eastern Laos into their economic and political domain. On the other hand, royal Siamese maps during the first three reigns of the Chakri (1782-1851) reflected Siamese consistent concern and their wide aware of Cambodia and those areas far beyond to the east. Five out of seventeenth existing Siamese royal hand-drawn and hand-colored cotton maps are reported to be about the Lower Mekong.³⁸

The need of producing new geographies comes from the fact that state of early nineteenth century had a greater attention on territory than that of any others before. This ideology of "politics of space" fundamentally placed political institution relied

³⁶ Ngaosyvathn, Mayoury and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn, *Paths to Conflagration: Fifty Years of Diplomacy and warfare in Laos, Thailand and Vietnam, 1778-1828* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1998), pp. 105-08

³⁷ Michael Vickery, "Two historical records of the Kingdom of Vientiane", in *Contesting Visions of the Lao Past: Lao Historiography at the crossroads*, eds., by Christopher E. Goscha and Soren Ivarsson (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2003), pp. 3-34

³⁸ Whitmore, *Cartography in Vietnam*, (1996); Santanee Phasuk and Phillip Stott, *Royal Siamese Maps: War and Trade in Nineteenth Century Thailand* (Bangkok: River Books, 2004)

mainly on manpower and taxation of traditional state. Ayutthaya for century accepted various levels of hierarchy of Tai *muang* through a “network of loyalty” or “a field of power”, rather than to extend the administrative function of state.³⁹ Burmese political institution, as victor Lieberman points out in case of the Toungoo Empire, mainly focused on seeking tax, manpower, and organizing military campaign throughout a clear distinct hierarchy of space, nuclear zone, zone of Dependent provinces, and the zone of tributary.⁴⁰ Prior to the late eighteenth century, the Vietnamese likely speak the same voice. The great Lê [後黎朝] king, Thánh Tông 黎聖宗 made a decisive victory over Champa in 1471, but instead of extinguishing the Champa name out of political map, he chose to divide the kingdom and create two new buffer vassals to make sure that Champa would be no longer his threat again. It is suggested that traditional model of Southeast Asian regional interaction left no room for the idea of control land or geopolitical surface which generally viewed as place of “*forest and mosquitoes*”,⁴¹ and conquering large space would provide the king with nothing. Early nineteenth century view of state toward the Mekong basin however shows a fundamental reconfiguration in this ideology. Phan Huy Chú 潘輝注 stated in 1820 that “of the national treasure, nothing can compare with land from which people and prosperity are all generated”.⁴² Other Vietnamese officers mentioned interests in economic benefits of the region in a report to Huế, “[In Cambodia] Land is fertile and abundant here and population is scarce. Only thirty to forty percent of the land is under cultivation, mainly for cotton and betel nut and a little rice. Merchants come

³⁹ See S. J. Tambiah, World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand Against a Historical (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), Sunait Chutintaranond, Cakravatin: Ideology of Traditional Warfare in Siam and Burma, 1548-1605, Ph. D dissertation, Cornell University, 1990; Oliver W. Wolter, History Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1998); Pamaree Surakiat, The Changing Nature of Conflict between Burma and Siam as seen from the Growth and development of Burmese States from the 16th to the 19th Centuries, ARI Working Paper, No. 64, March 2006

⁴⁰ Lieberman, Burmese Administrative Cycles: Anarchy and Conquest, c. 1580-1760 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984)

⁴¹ Nicolas Gervaise, The Natural and Political History of the Kingdom of Siam, John Villiers, tr. (Bangkok, 1989), 27, Hong Lysa, Thailand in the Nineteenth Century, (ISEAS, Singapore, 1984), pp. 9-10; George Dutton, The Tây Sơn Uprising Society and rebellion in eighteen-century Vietnam (Honolulu: Hawai'i University Press, 2006); Nicolas Weber, The destruction and assimilation of Campa (1832–35) as seen from Cam sources, Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, 43(1) February 2012, p. 162

⁴² Phan Huy Chú 潘輝注, Lịch Triều Hiến Chương Loại Chí 歷朝憲章類誌 [A Reference Book of the Institutions of successive Dynasty], Địa Dư Chí [Institution of Geography]

here to trade for local products and make big profits”.⁴³ Minh Mạng himself paid a great deal with the land of thousand miles far from his capital:

“[In Cambodia] I have heard that, for example, the land is plentiful and fertile, and that there are plenty of oxen [for plowing] ... but the people have no knowledge of [advance] agriculture, using picks and hoes, rather than oxen. They grow enough rice for two meals a day, but they do not store any surplus. Daily necessities like cloth, silk, ducks and pork are very expensive”.⁴⁴

The more focus on “territory” is the dominant feature of new political phenomenon in both Siam and Đại Nam. It generates contour of state structure over geopolitical surface which coming closer to the modern idea of territory, sovereignty and boundary. In other words, politics of space became *de facto* main concept to configure power paradigm in early nineteenth century mainland, particularly in the cases of Rama III and Minh Mạng those who had a strategic view of the space between Sài Gòn and Bangkok, not simply as periphery or overlapping zone but to incorporate into state domain.

Siamese and Vietnamese concern on Cambodia and Laos can be traced back to seventeenth century and at this point, powers in Vietnam saw the Mekong as a dynamic source for regional confrontation. As Hoàng Anh Tuấn points out, despite the military thread from the north, the seventh century Nguyễn Cochinchina launched campaign into Cambodia in seeking for rice.⁴⁵ However, it took one more century for the Nguyễn to steadily set up their political network in the Lower Mekong before performing as a real regional power in the mainland. At the end of the 18th century, political and economic crisis in both Siam and Đại Việt led their rulers come closer to the region and found there sources of restoration for their dynasties.

⁴³ Tran Tay Phong Tho Ky, p. 151

⁴⁴ Đại Nam Thực Lục 大南寔錄 [Primary compilation of the Veritable Records of the Imperial Vietnam], quoted in Chandler, A History of Cambodia, (2008), p. 152

⁴⁵ Hoàng Anh Tuấn, “Land or Rice? A Reassessment of the Nguyễn’s Diplomacy in the late 1650s-early 1660s”, paper presented at the Conference on Nguyễn Vietnam, Hong Kong 2012, University of Hong Kong and Harvard University

New cartography and geographical reports from Sài Gòn, Huế and Bangkok reveal the rising attention of those centers toward the region. Nguyễn Ánh had conducted map-making in Gia Định between 1779 and 1800 and then extended into the Lower Mekong in 1805.⁴⁶ Numerous amounts of geographical documents produced during the early nineteenth century shows the Hue's special interests toward the Mekong. It is the first time the Vietnamese has shifted their attention from the northern "space" to the western "space" as main direction of power orientation. There are a number of reasons responsible for this change, including the more engagement of Dai Nam with Southeast Asian polities than with the northern frontier of China. There was no longer potential thread from Chinese invasion, and the gradually decline of the northern empire encouraged the Nguyễn turning view from the "Chinese World" to the "Southeast Asian World".

Increasing body of knowledge about neighbors is product of such shifting focus and concern. The phenomenon can be traced back to the Tây Sơn 西山朝 period when Mekong valley directly became part of Vietnamese regional conflict. Having close connection with highlanders in the Central Highland and launching campaigns into Laos for several times, the dynasty started extensively collecting records on the Mekong basin. During its last years, a map of Tai world, *Đại Man Quốc Đồ* 大蠻國圖 [Map of Great Barbarian Polities], was introduced, showing Tai principalities *muang/trinh* [Chiang/Xieng] to the western Vietnamese mountainous province, Hung Hóa, and reflects its view of the Mekong, Chao Phraya, and possibly Salween river systems.⁴⁷

What comes across clearly from the sources is that the Nguyễn requested systematic reports of the Mekong valley and the southwestern sea. The 1810 journal on six overland and maritime routes linking Lower Mekong, Siam and Malay Peninsula, for instance, suggests the need of geographical records for military and

⁴⁶ Trịnh Hoài Đức 鄭懷德, *Gia Định Thành Thông Chí* 嘉定城通志 [Ga Dinh Gazetteer], trans., Lí Việt Dũng, hereafter: GDTTC, (Nxb Đồng Nai, 2005), p. 115

⁴⁷ John K. Whitmore, Cartography of Vietnam, in *The History of Cartography*, Volume Two, Book Two, Cartography in the Traditional East and Southeast Asian Societies, edited by Harley, J. B and David Woodward, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 497-98

economic purpose. *DNTL* in 1809 stated that Siamese official came to Hue to announce that their king Rama I had died. Thus, two officials, Tống Phúc Ngoạn 宋福玩 and Dương Văn Châu 楊文珠 were sent to Bangkok in response to this and in order to bring their emperor's formal condolences. However, Thai historical records have more details. Phrarachaphongsawadan Krung Rattanakosin Chabap Hosamuthaengchat: Rachakan Thi I – Rachakan Thi II also mention that the envoy came to pay tribute, gifts, and congratulation to the new king, Rama II. Moreover, it is reported that they announced Gia Long's claim of authority over Hà Tiên 河仙 Phathaimat/ Bonthaimat (in Thai). At the same time, Nguyễn official Chronicles of *DNTL* informs of the Siamese court's request to Gia Long for sending troops by the route of Laos to help Bangkok repel the Burmese assault from the north. Hue then prepared an army of 1,400 men in Gia Định for this mission.⁴⁸ From Hue perspective, those movement was becoming increasingly significant for its coming back as a regional power, particularly to regain influence in Cambodia. The 1810 mission reportedly came back and presented a map to the king. The journal of *Xiêm La quốc lộ trình tạp lục* 暹羅國路程集錄 (Collected Records of Itineraries to Siam) is likely very much involved with a preparation for military actions along the Mekong.

Other records cover a wide range of geographical area comprising Laos, Cambodia, northwestern mountains of Dai Nam and the southern sea. According to Trần Kinh Hòa (陳荆和 Chen Chingho)'s report, at least thirty missions had been dispatched overseas by Hue during the first half of the nineteenth century,⁴⁹ and many of them had journal records. Phan Huy Chú 潘輝注 started his journey with the observation that:

“The Sea is so broad. To the southwest, savages (*Yi*) live in islands in the number of hundreds, among wave, water and fog. Therefore,

⁴⁸ *Xiêm la quốc lộ trình tạp lục*, pp. 1-4

⁴⁹ Chen Chingho, “On the “Hà Châu missions” conducted during the early period of the Nguyễn Dynasty, in *The Journal of the Institute of Asian Studies (Soka University)*, Tokyo, Mars No. 11, pp. 63-82; trans., en français par C. Salmon avec le collaboration de Shibata Shnitara et Tạ Trọng Hiệp, sous presse in BEFEO, 1994

intellectuals have never been there so far. Currently, our emperor of great righteousness and generosity is well-known abroad, the sea and the sky are in peace. Ships are annual dispatched to distant place as smoothly as traveling on the plain. Confucian scholars on those missions usually acquaint useful information, enriching their minds through (what) they see and hear, and strengthen their knowledge.”⁵⁰

The Mekong valley has an indispensable role to play in the early nineteenth century Nguyễn’s foreign policy. A strong scrutiny on politics and peoples was increasingly addressed by Hue in order to have better knowledge and information. *Mạc Thị Gia Phả* 河僊鎮葉鎮鄭氏家譜 [The Genealogy of Mac Family of Hà Tiên, Vũ Thế Dinh 武世營, c.1818] provides information on Siam, Cambodia and Nguyễn Cochinchina during the time of Taksin and Nguyễn Anh (or Ong Chiang Sua, in Thai).⁵¹ Following Siamese and Dai Nam confrontation, a large number of Laos and Cambodia had been produced, including Phạm Đình Hồ 范廷琥’s *Đại Man Quốc đồ* 大蠻國圖 [Map of Great Barbarian Kingdoms], and *Ai Lao Sứ Trình* [Journal of the Embassy to Laos], Ngô Cao Lãng’s *Quốc Triều Xử Trị Vạn Tượng Sự Nghi Lục* [Journals of Our Imperial Court’s Actions with Regard to the Incident involving the Kingdom of Ten Thousand Elephants]⁵², *Trần Tây Phong Thổ Ký* [The Custom of the Western Protectorate, c. 1830s], *Hung Hóa Ký Lục* [Record of the Hung Hoa

⁵⁰ Phan Huy Chú, *Hải Trình Chí Lục* [Haizheng zhilue or Recit sommaire d’un voyage en mer], trans., and ed. Phan Huy Le et al. (Paris: Association Archipel, 1994) p. 139; Tổng Phúc Ngoạn, Dương Văn Châu, *Xiêm La Quốc Lộ Trình Tập Lục*, ed. Chen Chingho (Hongkong: New Asia Research Institute Historical Material Series No. 2, Chinese University of Hongkong, 1966, Lý Văn Phức 李文馥, *Tây Hành Kiến Văn Ký Lục*, [A Brief Report of what have been seen and heard along the Western Journey] (1830), shelf no. A.234, Viện Hán Nôm; Geoff Wade, “A Maritime Route in the Vietnamese Text-Xiem La Quoc Lo Trinh Tap Luc”, in *Commerce et Navigation en Asie de Sud-Est (XIVe-XIXe siècle)*, ed., Nguyễn Thế Anh and Yoshiaki Ishizawa (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1999), idem, A “Coastal Route” from the Lower Mekong Delta to Terengganu, in Cooke, Nola & Tana, Li, eds., “Water Frontier: Commerce and the Chinese in the Lower Mekong Region, 1750-1880” (Singapore and Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC, 2004)

⁵¹ See David K. Wyatt and Constance M. Wilson, Thai Historical Materials in Bangkok, The *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Nov., 1965), pp. 105-118, David Chandler, *Cambodia before the French: Politics of a Tributary Kingdom*, Ph.D dissertation, University of Michigan, 1973

⁵² Ngô Cao Lãng, *Vietnamese source materials concerning the 1827 conflict between the court of Siam and the Lao principalities: journal of our Imperial Court’s actions with regard to the incident involving The King of Ten Thousand Elephants* [Quốc Triều xử Trị Vạn Tượng Sự Nghi Lục], Introduction and Annotations by Mayoury and Pheuiphanh Ngaosrivathana (Tokyo: Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies for Unesco, Toyo Bunko, 2001), 2 vols.

Province, 1856, by *Phạm Thân Duật* 范慎通, 1825–1885] mentioned various aspects of Vietnamese interaction with Cambodia, Laos and Siam.⁵³ Attempt to collect information of polities in the mainland also come from the fact that the Nguyễn is the only dynasty offered two sections of “*Triều cống*” 朝貢 [Tributary] and “*Nhu viễn*” 柔遠 [The harmonious management of distant peoples] separately in the dynastic records.⁵⁴

Right after receiving fruit from his administrative reform and renaming the kingdom to Đại Nam, the Nguyễn dynasty paid numerous attentions to produce cartography. Minh Mạng introduced the collection of *Đại Nam Toàn Đồ* 大南全圖 [The Complete map of Đại Nam, 1839] covering the regions of present day Vietnam, eastern Laos and central and eastern Cambodia. The map drawing in a European style portrays a better sense of the Mekong River system and the great lake in Cambodia.⁵⁵ Other maps like A Completed Map of the Great United Đại Nam 大南一統全圖 [*Đại Nam Nhất Thống Toàn Đồ*, 1838] show the areas of southern Laos, eastern Cambodia, and thirty-second provinces of the country.⁵⁶ It is the first time central and upper Mekong have been included into the map of Dai Nam as part of the imperial “territory”.

⁵³ “*Trần Tây phong thổ ký*”: The Customs of Cambodia, in *Chư dư chí tạp biên* [诸與志杂编], Its shelf No. VHv. 1729, Viện Hán Nôm; Phạm Đình Hồ, *Vũ Trung Tùy Bút* [Essays penned randomly in the rain], trans., Trần Thị Kim Anh (Hà Nội: Khoa học xã hội, 2003)

⁵⁴ Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Khâm Định Đại Nam Hội Điển Sự Lễ* [Official Compendium of Institutions and usage of Imperial Đại Nam], hereafter: DNHDSL 8 vols, (Hue: Thuan Hoa, 2005); idem, *Minh Mệnh Chính Yếu* [Abstract of Policy of Minh Mạng], hereafter MMCY, (Sài Gòn: Tủ sách cổ văn, ủy ban dịch thuật, 1974)

⁵⁵ John K. Whitmore, *Cartography in Vietnam*, p. 503

⁵⁶ Quốc Sử Quán Triều Nguyễn, *Đại Nam Liệt Truyện* [Collections of Biographies of Imperial Vietnam], Vol. 2, (Hue: Thuan Hoa Publisher House, 1993), p. 549; “*Tran Tay Phong Tho Ky*”, p. 149.

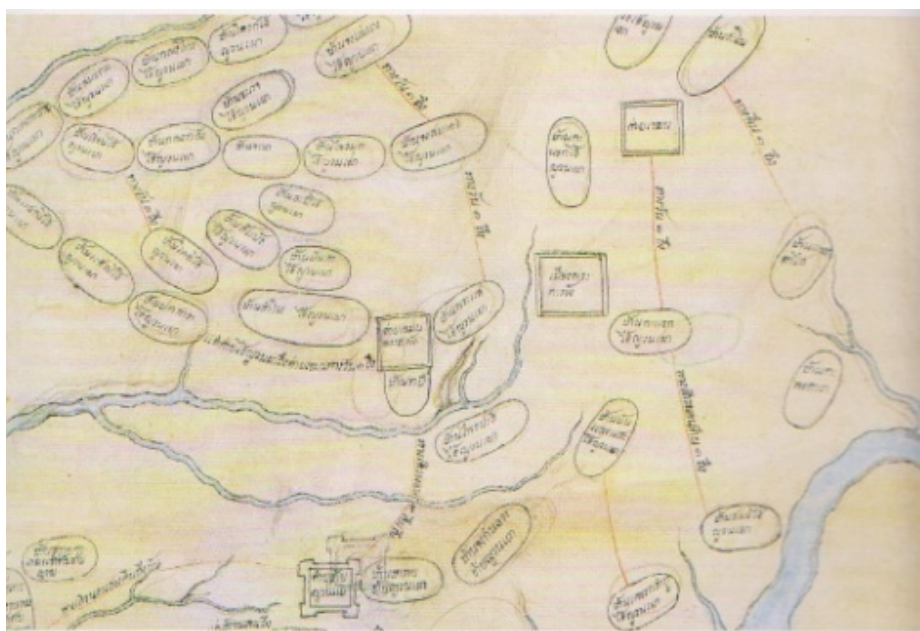


Map of the country in the Đại Nam Toàn Đồ 大南全圖

Source: Hamilton Library, University of Hawai'i at Manoa, Honolulu (microfilm collection, A.2559)

The Royal Siam Maps during the first three reigns of the Rattanakosin Era were not less significant than those of the contemporary Vietnamese. Most recently, in 1996, seventeen exquisite hand-drawn and hand-coloured cotton maps were discovered in the Grand Palace, Bangkok. Those long-lost treasures record cartographically Siamese warfare and trade between 1782 and 1851. Focusing on Siam and on her immediate neighbours, the collection also includes a remarkable four-metre coastal map extending from peninsular Malaysia to Korea. Among those, there are maps of *muang* Thalang, *muang* Lakhon/ Ko Mak/ Thalang-Sai [peninsular Siam, Saiburi, Penang], *muang* Thawai [Kanchanaburi, Suphanburi, Tak & Ava peninsula], *muang* Phrataphang [Mekong River Delta], Khmen Nai Ni [Lower northeast Siam to Upper Cambodia], *muang* Ubon/ Phnom Penh, *muang* Nakhon Si Thammarat, Phra Akkhanaesorn [the whole Cambodia], Angwa/Attapue [Southern Laos], *muang* Nakhon Si Thammarat [Peninsular Thailand and island Southeast

Asia].⁵⁷ These maps describe the Siamese remarkable understanding of the mainland Southeast Asia in general and the Mekong River Valley in particular, the area which became the main surface of confrontation between Siam and Vietnam. Some maps on southern Vietnam and Cambodia even show in detail village by village and estuary by estuary. The following sector of a map, for instance, draws settlements crossing border of southern Vietnam and Cambodia. In addition, other map is likely specially created for military and administrative purpose, particular the area along the Mekong River from Vientiane to Phnom Penh which was considered as strategic for Bangkok.⁵⁸



Detail of the Muang Phrataphang Map showing the intermingling of Khmer and Vietnamese sites. The inscriptions of villages often add *Ai Yuan Phao* meaning “the damned Vietnamese burnt this village”. The distances are shown using the day/night system.⁵⁹

Moreover, Siamese had a detailed understanding the Gulf of Thailand, islands and the Malay Coasts which allowed them to successfully prevail over banditry,

⁵⁷ Santanee Phasuk and Philip Stott, Royal Siamese Maps: War and Trade in Nineteenth Century Thailand, (Bangkok: River Books, 2004), p. 22

⁵⁸ Victor Kennedy, An Indigenous Early Nineteenth Century Map of Central and Northeast Thailand, from in Memoriam Phya Anuman Rajadhon (Bangkok: The Siam Society, 1970), Chulalongkorn University library, shelf no. TIC: 25331

⁵⁹ Santanee Phasuk and Philip Stott, Royal Siamese Maps, p. 27

smuggling, Chinese secret society and pirate.⁶⁰ They also continuously launched campaigns toward the Malay Peninsula, Laos, and Cambodia during the reigns of Taksin to Rama III which through those, they could master physical feature of the southwest Indochina. Their campaign in Vietnam in 1834 was well organized through the cooperation between the navy in Hà Tiên (Panthaimas) and infantry in Châu Đốc. Siamese also are said to have vivid understanding of Vietnamese and peoples in the Lower Mekong and used Vietnamese to serve in the army. In a poem, they express their view of the Cochinchinese:

This is a picture of a Vietnamese mandarin from the court of Huế.
 He wears a gorgeous dress in the procession, like a scene from Chinese Opera.
 The Vietnamese mandarin sits on a sedan and is followed by many people in the procession.
 He carries a black handled-fan and fans himself.
 [The Vietnamese] are a race with many faces and they have many tricks up their sleeves.
 They are very skillful in carpentry.
 They like to eat crocodile meat.
 And they settled along the river and were expert about boats.⁶¹

The idea of map, cartography and political philosophy accompany political evolution in the world history. “Maps blossom in the springtime of the state”,⁶² and state uses power of cartography to conquer new space in expanding its infrastructures and institutions. The geographical knowledge is undoubtedly the departure point for designing politics of space in both Siam and Đại Nam and constructing their structure of power over those geopolitical surfaces.* I shall discuss below the way state brought this body of knowledge into practical application economically. In this process, Sài Gòn and Bangkok played as headquarters of state from which state incorporated periphery and semi-periphery. In this respect, it is interesting to note that another

⁶⁰ Walter F. Vella, Siam Under Rama III, 1824-1851 (New York: J. J. Augustin Incorporate Publisher, 1957), p. 18

⁶¹ Davisak Puaksom, Khon Plaekna Nanachat Khong Krung Sayam (The Strangers of Siam) (Bangkok: Matichon Publishing, 2003), p 42; My thanks to khun Morragotwong Phumplab for the translation.

⁶² Denis Wood, Rethinking the Power of Maps, p. 15

* Of the relation between cartography and political structure, see Edson, Evelyn, Mapping Time and Space: How Mediaeval Mapmakers Viewed Their World, (London: The British Library, 1997), Norman J. W. Thrower, Maps and Civilization: Cartography in Culture and Society, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), Harley, J. B and David Woodward (eds), The History of Cartography, Volume Two, Book Two, Cartography in the Traditional East and Southeast Asian Societies, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994)

product new cartography brought to the Lower Mekong is political identification based on spatial identification. Prior to the second half of the 18th century, southwest Indochina maintained uncertain and ambiguous political identity among rising states. Map-making with active support of military and economic establishment helps to present line of demarcation along Siamese-Cambodian and Vietnamese-Cambodian borders. As it will be unfolded below, in many cases those boundaries come out mainly as a result of new state infrastructure. And by these means, collecting geographical data is crucial for the Nguyễn Dynasty, Thonburi and Bangkok powers. Nguyễn Ánh played as an active military and political figure in the region for twenty-five years. Taksin built his network of power in Chanthaburi and then tried to annex both Phnom Penh and Hà Tiên. Rama I and his younger brother engaged with military campaign in the Lower Mekong for decades before coming to the throne. All the successful campaigns they had made came from “periphery” to regain the “center” therefore, they presented an unique perspective for the need of incorporating such margins into core-state as an equally important administrative and territorial unit. At this point, there is no longer existence the template of inhomogeneous political organization. Diversity and centralized state did not share the same spirit in this level development and state found diversity as its main obstacle to expanded centralization. The answer for state success was to standardize political and economic category which could be effectively applicable over different physical terrain and human landscape. In other words, if the previous pattern of state can be acknowledged as “a field of power”, the later one was likely coming closer to be “seeing like a state”.

Geographical records and cartography visualize geopolitics and bring it into Siamese and Vietnamese attention. Prior to the second half of the 18th century, most parts of the Mekong valley maintained uncertain and ambiguous political identity among rising states, especially *muang* Laos in the central and “water world” of swamp in the lower part. Those areas have long been considered as margins of three great kingdoms of Siam, Dai Nam and Burma and usually invisible on the political maps. Collecting geographical data became crucial for the Nguyễn, Thonburi and Bangkok dynasties because all these successful campaigns they had made came from periphery to capture the center. Therefore, they presented a unique perspective for the

need of incorporating margins into state control as an equally important administrative and territorial unit. Nguyễn Ánh (or Ong Chiang Su, in Thai) played an active military and political role in the region for twenty-five years. Taksin built his network in Chanthaburi and then tried to annex both Phnom Penh and Hà Tiên. Rama I and his younger brother engaged with military campaign in the Lower Mekong for decades before coming to the throne. As strong and ambitious successors, Rama III and Minh Mạng had all those legacies of knowledge and of interest toward the Mekong basin.

To some extent, from centralized state perspective, the increasing knowledge reflects new acknowledgement of the Mekong basin as a geopolitics space. The area moved from “geographies of ignorance” to “geographies of knowing” (terms by Willem van Schendel) and geography of recognition.⁶³ The problem of the region before the 18th century is to “belong” to no one (politically in-determinate). This political neglect represents insufficient geographical knowledge and an incomprehensive view of the region as a complete geographical space. Nguyễn Ánh realized the need of such collective knowledge and perfectly spoke for a state-making idea to convert the status of “ignorance”. He first presented a coherence view of the Lower Mekong through maps. Even in the exile days during the wartime against Tây Sơn, had ordered to draw map of *Trấn Biên*, *Phiên Trấn*, *Long Hồ* in 1779.⁶⁴ Thus, the region gradually came into recognition geographically, politically and economically. Prior to the early 19th century, Vietnamese sparsely stationed in the most part of the Lower Mekong and had full political control by connecting dots of economic and settlement centers of Trà Vinh, Sóc Trăng, Cà Mau, Rạch Giá, Hà Tiên, Châu Đốc... and they had a legitimacy to create a coherent geography of the region.

Geographical knowledge contains in gazetteers and maps both from Siamese and Vietnamese perspectives is authentic and accurate, reflects the capacity of state to manage surface orientation of the region and the great concern they paid to it particularly in the condition that many parts of the region were still virtually unknown

⁶³ Willem van Schendel, ‘Geographies of knowing, geographies of ignorance: jumping scale in Southeast Asia’, *Environment and Planning, Society and Space*, 20, 6, 2002, pp. 647–68.

⁶⁴ GDTTC, p. 114

and invisible on maps, not long before the early 19th century. Even for the European, until the late nineteenth century, many travelers and mapmakers mentioned about the lack of map and records about the Mekong region. In 1861, before leaving from Khorat to Luang Prabang, Henri Mouhot wrote that, “To consult any existing maps of Indochina for my guidance in the interior of Laos would have been folly, no traveler, at least to my knowledge, having penetrated into east Laos, or published any authentic information respecting it. To question the natives about places more than a degree distant would have been useless ... Setting out from Khorat, I had but to proceed northwards as long as I found practicable roads and inhabited places; and if I could not go by a direct route to Louang Phrabang, I should only have to diverge to the east when I judged it necessary”.⁶⁵ Therefore, those maps and records reflect an important achievement of the local Siamese and Vietnamese in dealing with space, recognize space and attempt to reorganize space.

In short, geography and cartography are effective companions of state-making. By putting on map area of ambiguous political nature, they generate understanding of space and state strategy in dealing with controlling of space. Structure of power therefore became more authentic and easily set up over a vast space. If administrative function of previous political institution is limited and mainly focused on seeking taxes, manpower, and military campaign, power of geography allows state to establish complicated system in larger scale and more permanently.

4. 3. Nineteenth Century Centralized Expansion in the Mekong Basin

In this part, I suggest various forms of centralized establishments made by state to conquer space of the Mekong valley. One of the dominant physical features of the Mekong delta is difficult natural landscape and complex terrain. In the central, it is dense mountains and forest and in the lower, the vast underwater and amphibious plain. Because of this natural landscape, there was no major political center along the hundred miles of coastal line from Champa in the north past to the Mekong Delta

⁶⁵ Henry Mouhot's Diary, edited and abridged by Christopher Pym (Oxford, 1966), p. 140

around the Gulf of Thailand and south to Nakhon Sithamarat between 13th to the 18th century.⁶⁶ In the eighteenth century, political status of small ports or towns in the Lower Mekong was somehow presented as ambivalence and ambiguity due to the fact that they were products of a “centralized-free zone”.⁶⁷

However, significant transformation came to the Mekong space under the state making and centralized expansion. When Siam, Burma and Dai Nam were reunited, the scale of those centralized kingdoms reach to the last margins, frontier, and periphery of the mainland, most of them were challenging terrains along the Mekong River. The Khmer polity and Lao muang relatively retained freedom from outside political hegemony until a new Siam emerged from ashes of Ayutthaya and Vietnam was united in 1802. Victor Lieberman makes an observation of the new political context that, “for the first time, virtually the entire mainland, including upland valleys, was effectively divided among lowland-based empires, so the Burmese, Siamese, and Vietnamese realms of 1820/1830 were considerably larger than their charter predecessors. Finally, territorial extension required and reflected more effective internal administrative controls”.⁶⁸

During the first three reigns of Bangkok, Siamese kings sought control and annexation several areas which used to consider as position of vassal or periphery through the massive and violent military expeditions. Siamese army in the reign of king Rama III, in particular, is active in a vast territory of several thousand kilometers from the north to the south, stretching from Chiang Tung, Chiang Mai, Luang Prabang, Vientiane, Champassak, Phnom Penh, Khorat Plateau to the Malay Peninsula. Those military movements directly challenged the landscape of multi-

⁶⁶ Li Tana, “Water Frontier: Introduction”, (2004), p. 1

⁶⁷ Li Tana, *The Mekong Delta and its World of Water Frontier*, in Anthony Reid and Tuyet Nhung Tran, eds., *Vietnam Borderless History* (2006), pp. 151-5. For a political landscape of eighteenth century Southwest Indochina, see Nidhi Eossewong, *Politics in the Thonburi* (in Thai) (Bangkok: Matichon Press, 1986); Li Tana, *Nguyễn Cochinchina* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1998), Kitagawa Takako, *Kanbija Kairo no Kansei 1719 seiki, Mekong, Tonleshap Chiiki niokeru Network no Tanjo*” [Formation of the Cambodian Corridor: The Birth of the Mekong and Tonle Sap Regional Trading Network in the 17th-19th Centuries], Ph.D dissertation, University of Tokyo, 1999; Brian A. Zottoli, *Reconceptualizing Southern Vietnamese History from the 15th to 18th Centuries: Competition along the Coasts from Guangdong to Cambodia* (Ph.D dissertation, University of Michigan, 2011)

⁶⁸ Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*, vol. 1, p. 28

political center during the first two reigns that more or less can be described as a new level of Siamese centralized expansion in controlling rice, trading resources and manpower in both side of the Mekong basin.⁶⁹ The same picture is also acknowledged from the Vietnamese attempt to expand administrative system into southernmost Cochinchina, eastern Cambodia, and the northwestern mountain area. For the first time after two hundred year division, the country was united under authority of a single central government who control a territory as large as the present-day Vietnam. With a strong political ambition, the appearance of nineteenth century Vietnam accompanied with the need of reorganizing its territory for more effective management. The Minh Mạng's administrative reform shows the Vietnamese effort to bring state making up to mountain and ethnic minority area. Going to the west became new stream of Vietnam history. For a number of reasons, Minh Mạng was aware that the tie control of the new merged territories was politically and economically vital with trading resources coming from mountain along the Mekong and rice export from the lower river delta.⁷⁰

In doing so, Siamese and Vietnamese state conducted an unparalleled massive project to conquest the Mekong River and created a space of nation-bulidng by producing infrastructures in complex terrains and by expanding its institutions into periphery. Peoples at the frontier then were collected and resettled along those state facilities. Through territorialization of space, state built up new way of managing political surface by mean of administrative system, rather than traditional power relationship which mainly based on "loyalty".

Infrastructures of State-building in the Mekong Valley

The most fundamental changing of human landscape in the Lower Mekong from two thousand year perspective is undoubtedly the effort of state to conquer this complex terrain by canal system, traffic route and economic organization. Vietnamese

⁶⁹ Constance M. Wilson, The Holy Man in the History of Thailand and Laos, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 28, 2 (1997), pp. 345-364

⁷⁰ Yoko Takada, "The Rice Exports and the Colonial Tariff Policy of the French Indochina", in *Thailand and Her Neighbors(II): Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia* (Bangkok: Thammasat University Press, 1994), pp. 60-82

officials employed the phrase of “*vạch bờ cõi, phân địa lý*” [demarcating boundary and dividing geography] to refer to the process of dealing with the amorphous, amphibious nature which followed by population registration, cadastral survey, and taxation.⁷¹ The previous century experienced influx of peoples gathering at the economic centers which were usually strategic positions or easy for collecting natural resources and doing agriculture. Thus, there was a lack of organization and authority to establishing large scale expansion into swamps and fallow. However, the natural surface of the region was significant transformed with the appearance of the Nguyễn and Bangkok dynasty those for five decades were in attempt of filling the “empty space” with state institutions and mechanism.

By the end of the eighteenth century, in order to control the Lower Mekong, Nguyễn Ánh ordered to map and re-organize Gia Định, collecting cadastral survey in Mỹ Tho and setting up new administrative centers over new settlements.⁷² Two decades later, the contour of southern Vietnam appeared in a clearer shape as a pretty clear border with Cambodia was marked. At this point, under state cultivation, from a post for tax collection in 1623, southern Vietnam developed into a center of 40,000 households and an economic and politically strategic territory of the new kingdom.

Despite the fact that state was gradually moving toward the Lower Mekong for centuries, its increasing role in generating new economic landscape, claiming virgin lands, establishing settlements for migrants were strongly accompanied with military campaigns, territory expansion and removing peoples from all around into. In addition, after military dispatches fortresses and moats being built, administrative system being introduced and peoples being resettled along the main road, canal, and river bank where they then were recruited to exploit new land, building new hydraulic systems and communication network. This process saw the emergence of an original commune of “less than twenty people” to a prefecture of “more than forty thousand

⁷¹ DNHDSL, Vol. III, q. 36, p. 22

⁷² GDTTC, p. 114

households”, and then “five commanderies” *ngũ trấn* which finally developed to “six provinces”.⁷³

Infrastructures soon became the fundamental and effective factor in transforming the “blank space” of power into a source of dynamism for state building. At first, peoples of all kinds were collected at the frontiers for large scale public and private works. In the early days of Bangkok, ten thousand Cambodians forced to labour in digging canals allowed Bangkok from a low-lying, flat terrain of elevation less than 2 m above sea level become a capital.⁷⁴ Then, 5,000 Lao from Vientiane were recruited to construct fortifications and walls around and other 20,000 labors to drain the land and extend the city in a larger scale.⁷⁵ In the reign of Rama III, at least four large projects to improve waterways were completed. Among those was project to dig a canal linking Huamak to Bang Khanak, was thirty-three miles long, cost nearly 96,000 Baht, and took two years.⁷⁶ The impact of those works was extremely significant to create new human landscape for settlement. Most of new dense population of Bangkok runs along the newly-building canal system of *Ku Muang Dern canal, Bangkok Noi canal, Bangkok Yai canal, Rob Krung Canal, Ong Ang canal, Banglumphu canal, and Mahanak canal*.⁷⁷

In addition, there were numerous networks of short-cut canal, city-moat canal, and hydraulic channel excavating for the court and people daily life. The chronicle recorded that: “The King ordered the excavation of a large canal to the north of Wat Saket, named the Mahanak canal. This canal was excavated so that the city people could assemble, in boats, to perform music and to recite poetry as in the rainy season ceremony of the old capital, Ayutthaya”. Rama I also was reportedly to order that

⁷³ Nguyễn Đình Đầu, Chế độ công điền công thổ trong lịch sử khẩn hoang lập ấp ở Nam Kỳ Lục Tỉnh [The Institutions of Public Ricefield and Public Land in the History of Reclamation and settlements in Six Provinces in the Southern Region] (Hà Nội: Hội sử học Việt Nam, 1992), pp. 33-43, 60-61

⁷⁴ Shigeharu Tanabe, “Historical Geography of the Canal System in the Chao Phraya River Delta: From the Ayutthaya Period to the fourth Reign of the Rattanakosin dynasty”, Journal of the Siam Society, Vol. 65, part 2, July 1977, p. 28

⁷⁵ Klaus Wenk, The Restoration of Thailand under Rama I, 1782-1809 (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1968), pp. 19-22

⁷⁶ Water F. Vella, Siam Under Rama III, p. 24

⁷⁷ Pussadee Tiptus, Settlement in the Central Region of Thailand, in Proceedings of the International Conference: The Chao Phraya Delta: Historical Development, Dynamism, and Challenges of Thailand’s Rice Bowl, Vol. 2 (Bangkok: Kasetsart University, 2000), p. 17

bricks brought from the ruins of Ayutthaya be used to construct a barrage to hold back the tidal water and prevent it from damaging rice field.⁷⁸ In the time of Rama III, those canals continued moving eastward along with Siamese increasing engagement in Cambodia and Cochinchina. Many routes and waterways were specifically and originally built for military purpose to solve their main challenge of rapid conveyance of troops and supplies in supporting for newly establishing sovereignties. Several channels were constructed to connect Bangkok with Khorat Plateau and inner Cambodia which played crucial role in Siamese military responses to Lao and Cambodian incidents. The Sean Saep Canal was built in 1837 with the aim of hastening the movement of troop and military supplies to Cambodian territory. The eastern part of this canal called Bang Khanak which extended to the Prachin Buri River.⁷⁹ In 1860, some western travelers from Bangkok to Phnom Penh actually used those canals and routes as the only channel to get into inner Cambodia. O. D. King described his trip in 1859 in the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* that a fifty-five mile canal connected Bangkok with eastern shore of the gulf of Siam. Other waterways and roads were links together toward Cambodia and exclusively used by travelers. Those channels were built some twenty years ago during a war with Cochinchinese and originally used for military purpose.⁸⁰

To the east, as moving deeper into the vast complex terrain of the Lower Mekong, Vietnamese faced more challenges of communication and expanding ricefields. Most of areas along the river banks and of easy cultivation were captured and canal and irrigation works were the only choice for state to move forward into the amphibious world. In 1817, Gia Long examined the map of Châu Đốc and instructed that:

“For this region, it is now the time to open a river-route to go straight to Hà Tiên, [peoples] would easily make business and do agriculture. Then, people

⁷⁸ Shigeharu Tanabe, *Historical Geography of the Canal System*, pp. 40-41

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 44

⁸⁰ D. O. King, *Travels in Siam and Cambodia*, *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, Vol. 30 (1860), pp. 177-182

are crowded, lands are going to expand, [Châu Đốc] can be a huge commandery”.⁸¹

During last years of Gia Long and Minh Mạng reign, building canal, route and military fortress are the main public works which the Nguyễn conducted in the southern region. Tens of thousands of peoples, including Vietnamese, Chinese, Malay, Khmer, Cham were voluntarily or forced to move following this unprecedented phenomenon. Two prominent figures directly involved in this movement are Thoại Ngọc Hầu 瑞玉侯 and Lê Văn Duyệt 黎文悅. In 1817, the project started with excavation of the Thoại Hà River. *DNTL* wrote that, after upgrading the Tam Khê River, 214 dặm far from Vĩnh Thanh town, the King [Gia Long] recognized that the land next to Cambodia is vast and amphibious, river-route through Kiên Giang is stuck because of mud, ships are not navigable, [thus orders] the commander of Nguyễn Văn Thoại to repair this waterway, collecting Vietnamese, Khmer of 1,500 people with the support of rice and money from the state to widen the lane. After one month, the river is now of 42.40 m in width, 7.63 m in dept and 60 dặm (c. 40 km) in length which connected Vĩnh Thanh to Kiên Giang. Along the canal, traffic of people of Việt 越 and Thổ 土 was greatly generated.⁸²

In 1819, people from Phiên An were moved to dig the An Thông River, also known as Sài Gòn River. The original was small and unnavigable during the dry season. Gia Long in 1819 ordered 11,460 đinh for construction of a new canal of 2,129 *tầm* in length (6.812 km). *Gia Định thành thông chí (GD TTC)* 嘉定城通志 described that on the new canal, ships and boats continued in ten mile long, moving following the up and down of the water level, [peoples] sailing and dancing, busting in day and night.⁸³

The western Cochinchina is a real challenge for any Vietnamese attempt of “going west” because of significant muddy landscape. The project moved to the west of the Lower Mekong (Transbassac) and the Vietnamese-Cambodian border in order

⁸¹ *DNTL*, Vol. 4, p. 308

⁸² *GD TTC*, p. 84, *DNTL*, vol. 4, p. 335

⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 45

to link several strategic exiting towns and economic centers. Nine thousand men were recruited in 1819 for the excavation of the Bảo Định River to open a bridge between the eastern and western southern Vietnam. However, the most significant public work in the early 19th century Lower Mekong is the Vĩnh Tế canal. It took totally a hundred thousand Vietnamese and Khmer working for five years to complete a ninety kilometer waterway links Hà Tiên and Châu Đốc. Despite of a Khmer uprising and lot of challenges, the completion of the project makes the vast area of thousand square kilometers accessible for Vietnamese, Cham, Malay, Chinese, and Khmer.⁸⁴ Châu Đốc-Vĩnh Tế canal became new hub on the channel between Hà Tiên, Sài Gòn and Phnom Penh-Tonle Sap. From Châu Đốc to Phnom Penh is 244.5 dặm (176.04 km). Twenty-five dặm to the west of Châu Đốc is Phong Cần Thăng River in the Cambodian territory which leads to the “old road” of Cambodia locating to the west of 60 dặm.⁸⁵ The project shapes the contour of new human landscape by compassing two main centers of settlement in Hà Tiên and area between Tiền Giang and Hậu Giang. “Since then, state management on boundary and people business have been greatly facilitated”.⁸⁶ It now only takes a day and a night in a good wind to reach the Tonle Sap from the southern Vietnam and if one relies on tidal water, ships can easily reached to Phnom Penh.⁸⁷ And also, a new movement of people moved to set up villages along the canal and conducted cross border trade.

Infrastructure associating with central state, including canals, hydraulic system and settlements on newly exploited land had greatly contributed in producing pattern of economic exchange and market through the region. The phenomenon was partly resulted from the change pointing out by Victor Lieberman that the Lower Mekong actively took part in rising bulk commodity trade in Southeast Asia, especially rice, salt, and salt fish.⁸⁸ Other seventeen big ports and a doubled number of the smaller

⁸⁴ See David Chandler, *An Anti-Vietnamese Rebellion*, pp. 16-22; Nguyễn Văn Hầu, *Thoại Ngọc Hầu và những cuộc khai thác miền Hậu Giang* [Thoại Ngọc Hau and the Campaigns to reclaim the Transbassac] (Ho Chi Minh City: Trẻ, 1999)

⁸⁵ GDTTC, pp. 82-3

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 83

⁸⁷ Nguyễn Đình Đầu, *Chế Độ công điền*, p. 95; *Tran Tay phong tho ky*, p. 150

⁸⁸ Victor Lieberman, Local Integration and Eurasian Analogies: Structuring Southeast Asian History, c. 1350-1830; *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (1993), p. 491, Li Tana, The Rice Trade in the Eighteenth and the Early Nineteenth century Lower Mekong Delta and Its Implications, in

took part in infrastructure network in the southern Vietnam.⁸⁹ State institutions the Nguyễn setting up in the Lower Mekong changed the structure of geopolitical surface. From area of core-state such as Sài Gòn, state incorporated local centers and conquered the swamp by filling out with people, communication, irrigation, and authority. Economically speaking, those productions of centralized state establishing in the southwest Indochina promoted economic linkage throughout the region: eastern and southeastern Thailand, Cambodia with eastern and western southern Vietnam via overland route, canal, and maritime link. Politically speaking, those state institutions contributed to reconstruct Siamese and Vietnamese geopolitics because of the fact that most of regions they recently moved into were originally considered as periphery or overlapping zone. The presence of state authority then marked those discourses came to an end and the emergence of others, territory and boundary.*

The effects of early state-making and infrastructure-building in the Lower Mekong were still significantly neglected due to the fact that the “myth of colonial politics” has been academically dominated the theme.⁹⁰ In addition, local sources say little about how the nature had been conquered and first settlements were established. Most of the Lower Chao Phraya and the Lower Mekong are considered to be very difficult for human settlement unless there are effective hydraulic systems. Therefore,

Thailand and Her Neighbors (II): Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia, ed., Thanet Aphornsuvan (Bangkok: Thammasat University Press, 1995), pp. 198-214

⁸⁹ GDTTC, p. 119

* Generally speaking, geopolitical structure of a premodern mainland state can be revealed of three main spaces of core, periphery and overlapping zone. Core is the lowland area as politico-economic, religious, and demographic center relatively. Core is characterized by centers or nuclear zone, notably economic and political centers. Sometime, core is consisted of center of dependent areas. Periphery is zone of influence or overlapping zone. Periphery is the surface of traditional political influence and considered as part of political domain. And overlapping zone is the area in between powerful political domains or among different political extensions.

Relating to the modern political science's perception of politics of space and periphery: theoretically, politics on the periphery which the idea behind is that among the diverse fragmentary political entities, one would emerge to establish political-identity hegemony. This term refers both to the relative predominance of a national identity within “the people” and to the relative empowerment of a cohort of politicians associated with that project within “the homeland”. Under political-identity hegemony, intellectuals and the public at large are not torn among competing national identities. Within the borders of the homeland, the cohort of politicians associated with the project of segment-state determines when and whether alternative national identities will be expressed in politics. See Philip G. Roeder. Where Nation-State come from: Institutional Change in the Age of Nationalism (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 16

⁹⁰ See Nola Cooke, Colonial Political Myth and the Problem of the Other: French and Vietnamese in the Protectorate of Annam, (Ph.D dissertation, ANU, 1990); David Biggs, Quagmire: Nation-Building and Nature in the Mekong Delta (University of Washington Press, 2011)

infrastructure under state management was crucial to open the region for movement of people. Most parts of settlement in the southwest Indochina are recognized to be very recent and no doubt, state mainly provided motivation for this phenomenon.

In the central Mekong, dense forest, mountain and scattered population seemed to be uneasy challenges for both Siam and Dai Nam. Taking the view from the Chao Phraya valley, prior to the seventeenth century, Lao *muang* specifically played as main source of forest product for Ayutthaya trade. Lao merchants were reportedly to bring benzoin, gumlac, and gold in exchange with Indian commodities from Ayutthaya.⁹¹ At the same time, the whole area in the both sides of the Mekong were gradually settled by Lao people, those are said to moved into the Khorat Plateau during the seventh and eighteenth centuries.⁹² The Siamese control of this area can only trace back to the reign of king Narai (r. 1656-68) as Nakhon Ratchasima (Khorat) was founded as an outpost in dealing with the northwestern region.⁹³ However, it would take Siam for a century to move further into the central Mekong by the campaign of king Taksin and to take several decades more to overwhelm local principalities and put them under the Bangkok control. Other towns were gradually established further north, such as Suwanaphum and Roi Et in 1772 and 1775 respectively.⁹⁴ Rama I set up Pae (later became Buriram) between 1788 and 1789, and the town of Kalasin in 1791.⁹⁵

A Siamese strategic map of “A Logistics map from the Reign of Phra Bat Somdet Phra Ramathibodi I” (Phaen thi yutthasat khrang ratchakan khong phra bat somdet phra ramathibodi thi nung) possibly producing for military purpose shows traffic routes, and military fortresses established along the right side of the Mekong from Vientiane to Phnom Penh. From the map, the whole northeastern region was

⁹¹ George Vinal Smith, The Dutch in the Seventeenth century Thailand (Northern Illinois University: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1977), pp. 61-62

⁹² Puangthong, War and Trade, p. 39

⁹³ Paitoon Meekusol, Social and Cultural History of northeastern Thailand from 1868 -1910: A Case Study of the Huamuang Khamen padong (Surin, Sangkha and Khukhan), (Ph.D dissertation, University of Washington, 1984), p. 38

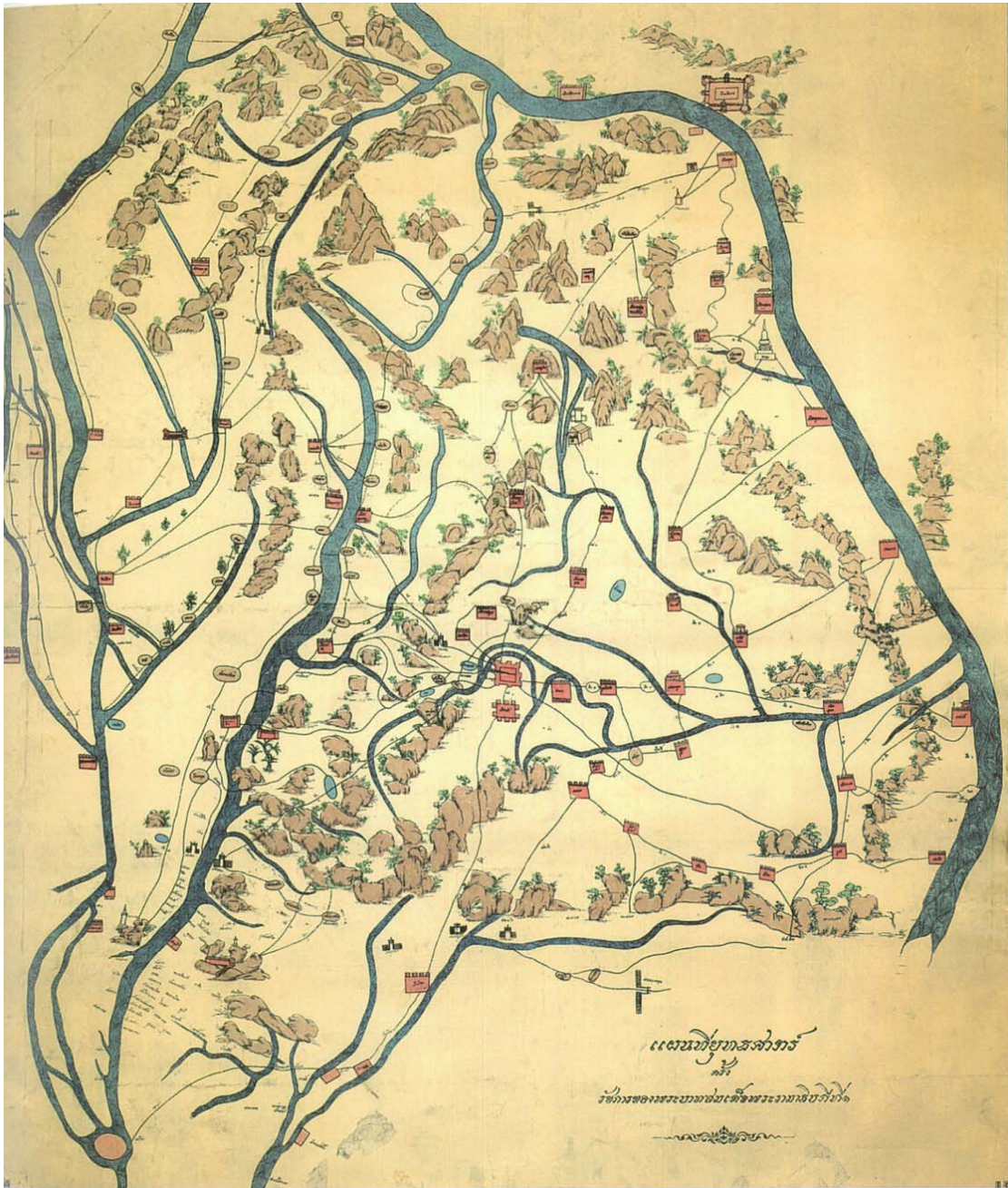
⁹⁴ Bunchuai Atthakorn, Prawatsat haeng phak Isan lae Mahasarakham bang ton (History of the Northeast and Mahasarakham, incomplete), (Bangkok, 1962), pp. 38-39

⁹⁵ Praphat Trinarong, Suksa lae Thieo nai Muang Thai [Study Research and travel in Thailand], (Bangkok, 1959), pp. 25, 497

divided into nine areas (with other 7 areas in the center and the south). In Khorat alone, thirty-five walled towns and many villages are named with river and overland roadmap to link the Chao Phraya valley with towns and military posts up to the Mekong river banks of present-day Laos and Cambodia. “The map could be described as a graphic aid to the collation of a number of routes and the principal towns and villages on those routes. As such it is superior to a mere list of names of places along various routes accompanied by estimates of distances between consecutive towns”.⁹⁶ It appears that state infrastructures were moving forward into the Khorat and approaching most of demographic and economic center of the region. Later on, Vietnamese military reports after the Chau A Nu movement (1827) suggested those expanded of Siamese across the Mekong River. Spies sending by Hue to Laos suggested the advance of Siamese in their new territory with roads, storehouse, and military fortresses, “Nguyễn Đình Hưng and Vu Đình Hậu reported that at the hour of Cock, in the 26th day of the first month, [Vietnamese] military officers in Tran Ninh [Laos], named Tong Phuc Minh and Truong Van Su made a report that, Vietnamese spies were sent to the kingdom of Nam Chuong [Luang Prabang]. Those informed that this kingdom built two grain storehouse [for army], one on the Thi River bank, and one in baan Lang. The road from Thi River to Tran Ninh was widened. [Luang Prabang] also built two garrisons for Siamese troop’s camp”.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Victor Kennedy, An Indigenous Early Nineteenth Century Map of Central and Northeast Thailand, from in Memoriam Phya Anuman Rajadhon (Bangkok: The Siam Society, 1970), Chulalongkorn University library, shelf no. TIC: 25331, pp. 318-19, 321

⁹⁷ Quốc Sử quán nhà Nguyễn, Khâm Định Tiểu Bình Tiêm Khâu Phương lược [Strategy to suppress rebellion following the King order], Quyển / Volume 7, Library, History Institute, Hanoi



Strategic map from the Reign of Phrabat Somdet Phra Ramathibodi I

Source: Santanee Phasuk and Philip Stott, *Royal Siamese maps: war and trade in nineteenth century Thailand* (Bangkok: River Books, 2004), p. 51

Moving People along the State Infrastructure in the Mekong Valley

The resettlement of peoples from different ethnics who mostly located in the peripheries of Siamese and Vietnamese traditional domains into a new political economic system of the Lower Mekong, Chao Phraya basin, and Khorat reflected state's effort to implement policy of national integration with reference to the theory of ethnic and economic change. The state economic project in the region was huge and was in the need of tremendous manpower to change the natural landscape and build new human landscape applicable for settlement. State saw this process as *de facto* key for the success of conquering space. As a result, the movement of peoples under the state leadership fundamentally reconstructed the ethnic structure and geographical distribution. In return, those peoples engaged with the phenomenon were expected to start thinking of themselves as belonging to a distinctive sector of Siamese or Vietnamese societies rather than having a common cause with those seeking to create a Lao, Khmer, Cham, Malay, Mon states.⁹⁸ States in the southwest Indochina then intermingled them all together to facilitate a space of intermingling ethnicity and culture. Economically speaking, those peoples directly were responsible for creating Bangkok, Sài Gòn and all networks surrounding and connecting with them.

The need for collecting peoples along frontiers into the centers of Siam and Vietnam was indispensable for warfare, creating infrastructure and to be subject of state exploitation. The period following the fall of Ayutthaya was one of nearly continuous warfare for Siam. The Burmese initially continued to be Thai main threat, following up the campaign of 1767 with further invasions in 1785, 1786, 1787, 1793, 1797, 1802, 1804/05, 1810. The army of Taksin and the early Chakri kings ranged more widely than the previous military forces of any Thai kingdom: Laos in the late 1770s, 1819, 1827/28, and 1834; Cambodia in 1781, 1783, 1813, 1833/34, 1840

⁹⁸ Charles F. Keyes, "Hegemony and Resistance in Northeastern Siam", in Volker Grabowsky, ed., Religions and National Integration in Thailand 1892-1992 (Wesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1995), p. 161

through 1844; the Malay States in 1821, 1831/32, and 1839.⁹⁹ At the same period of time, the Nguyễn Rulers faced thirty-year war against the Tây Sơn, nearly four hundred rebellions throughout the kingdom in half of a decade later, military campaigns in Laos and Cambodia in 1812, 1827, 1833 through 1844, and a large number of troops had to permanently station along Vietnamese-Lao and Vietnamese-Cambodian borders. Warfare was the greatest consumer of manpower however the need for private and public works, and even the effect of epidemics were undoubtedly of not less importance.¹⁰⁰

Therefore, collecting, moving and resettling peoples in the Lower Mekong were among state priorities in the process of creation. Siamese establishment of two capitals was reportedly responsible for removing hundreds of thousands of Cambodians and Lao to the Central Plain where their resettlements expected along river banks, canals, and routes. War captives and Chinese migrants were other sources of human supply in this process. The rate of the flow of Chinese immigration to Siam progressively increased: it was estimated at 7,000 annually at the end of the reign of Rama II, at 15,000 annually for the end of the reign of Rama III, and therefore, it is indicated that over 250,000 Chinese entered Siam during the third reign alone.¹⁰¹ In the early campaigns of Taksin, Lao war-prisoners were removed to Saraburi in the 1770s, and another 5,000 were raided from Vientiane to supply construction labor in the 1780s, and levied 10,000 Khmer for canal construction. In addition, in 1815, a force of 30,000 Mon crossed over the passes into western Siam and applied for permission to settle.¹⁰² The wars in Lao and Cambodia then were also a good chance for Siamese to enrich her population. Taking the Laos expedition of Chaophraya

⁹⁹ Constance M. Wilson, The Status of Phrai and Thaat in Thailand during the Nineteenth Century, The 7th International Conference on Thai Studies, Amsterdam, The Netherland, July 4 through July 8, 1999, p. 6

¹⁰⁰ N. G. Owen, ed., Death and Disease in Southeast Asia: Explorations in Social, Medical and Demographic History (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1987), Terwiel, B. J, Asiatic Cholera in Siam: Its first Occurrence and the 1820 Epidemics, in Death and Disease in Southeast Asia, pp. 142-61, Li Tana, Epidemics, Climates and Trade in the Early 19th Century Vietnam, Abstract paper, Conference on the Nguyễn Vietnam: 1558-1885, University of Hongkong, May 2012

¹⁰¹ Vella, Siam Under Rama III, p. 27; Quaritch Wales, Ancient Siam Government and Administration (New York: Paragon Book Reprint, 1965), p. 68, William Skinner, Chinese Society in Thailand (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1957)

¹⁰² Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, Thailand: Economy and Politics (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 13

Bordin in 1827, for instance, the entire population of the kingdom of Vientiane, which consisted of one hundred thousand to 150,000 before the war, was forced to march to Siam.¹⁰³

The picture of those who were forced to move into the southwest Indochina was interestingly diverse. They were collected from all sorts of people from various geographical distributions. Lao from Vientiane and *muang* in the upper Mekong, such as *muang* Phuan, were set up along the Siamese-Cambodian border.¹⁰⁴ Hue policy of anti-Christianity was also responsible for thousands of Vietnamese who had to flee the Lower Mekong to Siam. Chanthaburi placing in the middle between Cà Mau Peninsula and Chao Phraya Estuary was among destination for those escaping Cochinchinese. Others in number of thousand were allowed to settle in ban Sam Xen (Sam Xen Village), a Vietnamese Christianity community in Bangkok.¹⁰⁵

The Nguyễn *de facto* started their authority in the southern Vietnam by building Sài Gòn citadel and surrounding military defenses in which at least thirty thousand were employed.¹⁰⁶ Although the influx of people into the Lower Mekong is a historic phenomenon, remarkable scale of this trend only came in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Several decades of warfare, starvation, epidemics and political instability led more people moved southward; particularly from the dense population plain of Tonkin.¹⁰⁷

Following state expansion in the Lower Mekong, Vietnamese and Khmer rapidly expanded their distribution both in the eastern and western Nam Bo [southern Vietnam] and to Cambodia under the Nguyễn instruction. Vietnamese from Long An,

¹⁰³ Chandler, *Facing the Cambodian Past* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1996), p. 91

¹⁰⁴ Snit Smuckarn and Kennon Breazeale, *A Cultural in Search of Survival: The Phuan of Thailand and Laos* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 28

¹⁰⁵ Thawi Swangpanyangkoon, “Cách đây hơn 100 năm, một bộ chính sử Việt Nam bằng chữ Hán đã được dịch ra chữ Thái” [Nearly a hundred years ago, An official Vietnamese Chronicles in Chinese was translated into Thai], *Tap chí xưa và nay*, No. 110 (12/2002), p. 23

¹⁰⁶ *Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Paris* [AMAE], série Asie, vol. 19, folios 376-7, letter from De Guignes to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 29 Dec. 1791 in Frédéric Mantienne, *The Transfer of Western Military Technology to Vietnam*, p. 522

¹⁰⁷ Yumio Sakurai, Peasant Drain and Abandoned Villages in the Red River Delta between 1750 and 1850, in Anthony Reid, ed., *The Last Asian Autonomies*, (Macmillan: London, 1997), pp. 133-52

Tiền Giang went further to the south of Hậu Giang, An Giang, Kiên Giang while the Khmer moved from coastal areas of Trà Vinh, Sóc Trăng, Giồng Giềng, Tri Tôn northward to look for fresh water and new cultivation land. To encourage more peoples to reclaim new land, between 1802 and 1855, the Nguyễn had twenty-five edicts to promote people reclaiming the fallows.¹⁰⁸

Nguyễn's policy in addition sent all kinds of rebels, unregistered farmers throughout the kingdom to the Lower Mekong to do agricultural plantation, such as groups of "Hồi Lương" and "Bắc Thuận" under Lê Văn Duyệt.¹⁰⁹ Other communities of Cham and Khmer sometimes were also organized as military plantations. The Nguyễn kings found this pattern as the strategic choice to move people into new lands under state control. "In four prefecture of Gia Định, land is broad. However, because of military campaigns, people were in starvation, land was left fallow, and farmers did not try their best, and grain for army was insufficient. Plantation is a good classic policy, [before] applying this policy; [I] want to know its strategy".¹¹⁰

For decades, both state and private plantation were set up along canals in Long Xuyên, Kiên Giang, Ba Thắc, Trà Vinh, Bà Rịa, Đồng Môn and all the new lands becoming easily accessible and reclaimable through waterways. Nguyễn state significantly assisted to this process by offering rice, cloth, and buffaloes at the beginning. Exploiters would not be charged for taxation in the first three years. All kinds of peoples from all walks of life were expected to take part of "going west" and "going east" of the delta. Those efforts involved with military troops, farmers, prisoners and their families of Vietnamese, Chinese, Khmer, Malay, and Cham:

Prisoners dispatching to new lands, local officials provided them with fallow, rice seeds, buffalo and agricultural tools. After one year, rice seeds have to pay back to the court. Buffaloes and agricultural tools are charged after three years. The prisoners are provided monthly with grains and yearly with cloth.

¹⁰⁸ Mạc Đường et al, *Vấn đề dân tộc ở Đồng Bằng Sông Cửu Long* [The Ethnic Issues in the Mekong Delta] (Hochiminh City: Khoa Học xã hội, 1991), pp. 32-33

¹⁰⁹ Also see Choi Byung Wook, *Southern Vietnam Under the Reign of Minh Mạng* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2004)

¹¹⁰ DNTL, vol. 2, p. 125

... If wives and children of prisoners voluntarily follow to the new land, grains and cloth are also supplied for them for one year.¹¹¹

The channel between Châu Đốc and Hà Tiên had the Nguyễn's strong concern to remove more people along the borderline for both economic and military purpose. "In 1817, promoting reclamation in Châu Đốc: the King thinks that Châu Đốc has fertile land and very little population, [the king] hears about a Cambodian official of Diệp Hội (a Chinese in Cambodia) who is favoured by people. [The King] appoints he as prefecture chief of Châu Đốc (cai phủ), and orders to collect Vietnamese, Khmer, Chinese those if are fruit farmers, potters, cattleman, blacksmith, let do their jobs. If one lacks capital, the state will provide with". A year later, Hue still received reports of lack of manpower at Châu Đốc, in response, the court continuously ordered more peoples to come. "Behind the Châu Đốc's fortress, there are abundant fallows, [to] order to the chief officials of Vĩnh Thanh Prefecture to collect Chinese, Khmer, Java (Đồ Bà) to station there, establish streets, market, reclaim fallows, and prohibit Vietnamese from disturbing them".¹¹² Thus, in 1830 there were forty-one communes in Châu Đốc with 800 *đinh*.¹¹³

Plantation became the pioneering economic institution set up by the Nguyễn to encourage influx of people following infrastructures built between the 1800s and the 1820s. The effectiveness of this organization comes from its diverse origins and possession, from its multifunction and its capability of expansion. In 1835, military plantation expanded to Hà Tiên and the troops were provided with buffaloes and an order "ploughing rice fields and practicing martial art at the same time".¹¹⁴ Those plantations could be focal points for villagers and communities those came later and set up surrounding. In this case, they provided supports for the newcomers and soon played as new administrative core of state at the local level. According to the court

¹¹¹ DNTL, vol. 3, p. 329

¹¹² QTCB, pp. 96, 102

¹¹³ Ibid, p. 148

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. 193

statistic, in 1822, state plantation in Gia Định had 117 offices of plantation which consisted 9,630 troops.¹¹⁵

The Cham and Malay migration illustrates other ways state collects and moves people along the frontier. They were removed from Cambodia as result of the Nguyễn's economic and military policy. During the reigns of Gia Long and early Minh Mạng, the Nguyễn ordered forced migrant of Cham and Malay in two specific regions of Tây Ninh and Châu Đốc.

“Tây Ninh and Châu Đốc were located on strategic routes. Thus the Cham and Malay colonies not only provided soldiers in the event of upheavals or armed confrontations but also served to consolidate the Vietnamese position in Cambodia.”¹¹⁶

Vietnamese authorities used the Cham and Malays as settlers in military colonies and in fact in the 1830s, those people had a tremendous role to play in the Vietnamese military occupation in Cambodia. In 1834, generals in charge of the colonization of Cambodia, including Trương Minh Giảng, insisted on the necessity of “gathering” (chiêu tập) the Cham and Malays to join the Vietnamese army of occupation.¹¹⁷ As a result, numerous Cham from Cambodia were relocated to the Tây Ninh region. Lê Đại Cương, touring surveillance commissioner (tuần sát) of the An Giang province, asked for Minh Mạng's permission to relocate the Cham, stating that, “On the road from Quang Hóa to Cư Giang, much land has not been cleared and is not suitable [yet] for cultivation. It is necessary to order the Cham exiles of Ân Khu (Angkor---) and Xam Bô (Sambor) to come to this place to farm the lands”.¹¹⁸

In addition to the forced emigration from Cambodia, the Vietnamese also ordered migrations within southern Vietnam. In 1843, provincial officials asked for permission to relocate 2,383 Cham and Malays who were from Trấn Tây (Western

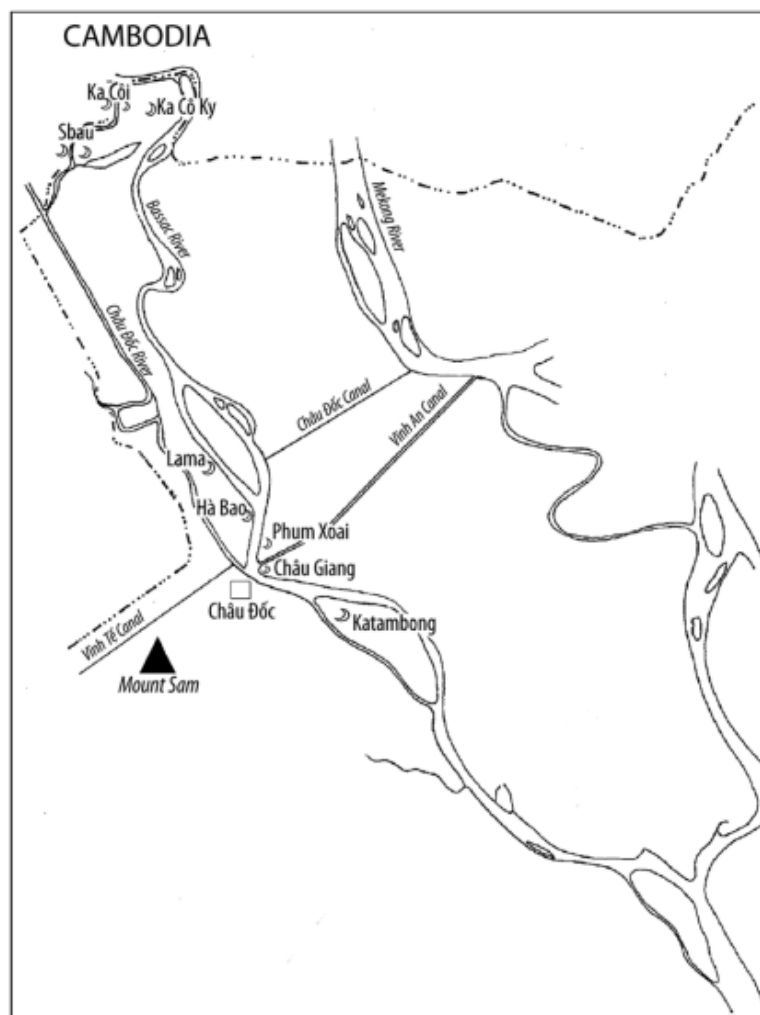
¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 120

¹¹⁶ Nicolas Weber, Securing and Developing the Southwestern Region: the Role of the Cham and Malay Colonies in Vietnam (18th-19th centuries), *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 54 (2011), p. 743

¹¹⁷ MMCY, Vol. 6, pp. 147-8.

¹¹⁸ QTCB, p. 177; MMCY, vol. 6, p. 154

Protectorate of Cambodia); they were first settled at the mouth of the Châu Giang River. According to these officials, the land was too muddy and therefore unsuitable for agriculture, and they then were stationed in Ba Xuyên,¹¹⁹ and 9 divisions of plantation were organized among the Cham in the region.¹²⁰



Cham settlements in Châu Đốc

Source: N. Weber, *Securing and Developing*, p. 746

Plantation policy resulted in significantly increasing area of ricefield and settlements following the state project. Between 1817 and 1869, many fallow areas which were thought of unreclaimed became prosperous settlements such as cù lao Dài

¹¹⁹ DNHDSL, q. 37, pp. 72-73

¹²⁰ Mạc Đường et al, Vấn đề dân tộc ở đồng bằng sông Cửu Long, p. 33

[Dai island], Sập mountain (1817), Cà Mau, Vũng Liêm (1848), Bình An commune (Kiên Giang) and Đá Dựng (1835), Sóc Trăng, Tịnh Biên, vùng Bảy Núi (1851). State authority closely followed those statements. In Lạc Hóa Prefecture, Vĩnh Long Province for instance, after new villages came out, the Court managed to collect tax on *đình* and land (thuế đình điền) and according to the scale of each settlement, the big is called “xã” (Commune), the small is called “thôn” (village), and setting new offices of districts and prefecture.¹²¹ In the middle of the 19th century, the number of villages in the southern Vietnam reached to nearly 2,000 (*GDTTC*: 1,489 villages; *DNNTC*: 2,063 villages).¹²²

Administrative Expansion

Massive expansion of state making caused the destruction of traditional power relationship in the Mekong valley. The region has long been described as a ‘social space’ of sharing value, culture, belief, identity and even kinship relation widely.¹²³ Human relationship therefore is historically shaped by the flow of water and streams along the “riverine exchange network”. Such discourse of political internal relation throughout the Mekong region faced severe challenge from two valley kingdom state making of Siam and Dai Nam who were able to relocate peoples and on maps and no longer accept to existence of any ambiguous political zone in between. State making orders a very clear political identification by marking space with label of authority and boundary. For centuries, Lao muang and Khmer polities were maintained as “*muong song fai fa*”, a principality with dual overlordship (sometimes, even triple overlordship could be accepted). However, Rama III and Minh Mạng offered no space for such ambiguity, but required frontier marked and direct control upon those polities. And therefore, administrative network were created throughout the Mekong space.

The expansion of centralization and administrative system however broke up such traditional and local authority and structure of power and placed those by new political institutions which were set up directly from political center. Peasant and

¹²¹ QTCB, p. 198

¹²² Nguyễn Đình Đầu, *Chế độ công điền*, p. 111

¹²³ Sachchidanand Sahai, *The Mekong River Space and Social Theory* (New Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 2005)

ethnic rebellion in early nineteenth century Vietnam reveals other form of local resistance. Choi Byung Wook and other argues that the Nguyễn centralized policy encouraged revolt of the minority those who had been forced to abandon their culture, language, economic nature and turned into “Viet” standard of civilization. The Cham in the central and Khmer in the lower Mekong escaped the Viet state making although not many among those were successful.¹²⁴

Interestingly enough, the establishment of administrative system is a popular phenomenon in Siam and Dai Nam between the 1820s and 1850s. It started with sending troops from the center in permanent control and dispatching central officers in permanent government. Then come to the process of cultural, social, and ethnic “assimilation” following the central model of state, of cadastral survey, population registration, taxation, and corvee obligation. Both Siam and Dai Nam experienced significant authority expansion in the early nineteenth century. As mentioned by Puangthong, “the period between 1767 and 1851 saw the expansive consolidation of Thai power over the major trading routes, extensive mobilization of manpower from the trans-Mekong basin and subsequent concentration of economic resources”. The whole area of Khorat Plateau was under Bangkok direct control and was tied with Siamreap and Battambang steadily. The fruit of those efforts were significant for Siam. Between 1767 and 1882, about 150 new *muang* were created in the Khorat Plateau, Laos and western Cambodia.¹²⁵

Using war captives is main strategy for both Bangkok and Hue in founding new demographic center and from then building administrative network. By the late eighteenth century, thousand of Lao were brought to other side of the Mekong where they were resettled and forming new district under the Thonburi control. The Kaeng Khoi district in Khorat for instant was founded by Taksin in 1778 with the prisoners

¹²⁴ Choi Byung Wook, Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mang (N. Y: Cornell University Press, 2004), Nicolas Weber., The Destruction and Assimilation of Campa (1832-5) as seen from Cam Sources, Journal of Southeast Asian Studies 43(1) 2012 : 158-180; Nicolas Weber, Securing and Developing the South- western Region: The Role of the Cham and Malay Colons in Vietnam (1759-1867), Journal of the Economy and Social History of the Orient 54 (2011): 739-772

¹²⁵ Puangthong. War and Trade, p. 54, Also see the “Strategic Map from the Reign of Phrabat Somdet Phra Ramathibodi I”, the map shows the state-control expansion over Khorat Plateau and Mun River Valley, and the left bank of Mekong River during the early Bangkok Period. Santanee Phasuk and Phillip Stott, Royal Siamese Maps, p. 51

of war from Vientiane.¹²⁶ The district then became important along the traffic route within the region. The Chao Phraya Estuary also witnessed fundamental changes under the Bangkok's management by utilizing labour of captives and refugee. Prior to the late 18th century, the region had scattered population because lands along the river bank were swamp and forest. Most of construction, infrastructure, and state institution there were established in the early Bangkok period. Lao, Mons and Chinese stationed at fortresses and villages between the estuary and Bangkok were products of state resettlement. Some important military posts such as the Pak Lat/ Nakhon Khuan Khan and Pak Nam were organized in the same strategy which the Nguyễn settled Chams and Malay along boundaries. The court chronicles reported that around three thousand Mons positioned at the Pak Lat under the command of three Mon leaders who had Phraya Rank from Bangkok.¹²⁷ Fallows along the river bank were opened to Chinese, Mon and Lao for cultivating rice and sugar cane. The Chinese were the major owners of sugar cane plantation which offered the important exported product for early nineteenth century Siam.¹²⁸ Apart from sugar, rice and tobacco production also benefited from increasing reclamation of the Chao Phraya. John Crawford wrote that "I have enumerated the article of tobacco [in the list of "staple production of culture", the other items being rice, sugar, and pepper] to show by its example that a favorable and extraordinary start has of late years taken place in the industry of the country. Twenty year ago, this commodity was chief imported from Java, but at present the Siamese, who are great consumers of this drug, produce not only enough for their own consumption, but export a consider quantity to Kambodia and to Indochina."¹²⁹

After Chau Anu rebellion, Siam brought all the former Vientiane territory and those allies of Chau A Nu under its direct administration. The same effort was made by Rama III to annex western provinces of Cambodia such as Siem Reap and Battambang as part of Siamese political domain. In Dai Nam, Alexander Woodside also informs that number of districts in Vietnam has reached from 178 in the sixteen

¹²⁶ Kennedy, *An Indigenous map*, p. 324

¹²⁷ Terwiel, *Through Travellers' Eyes*, pp. 40-41, 52

¹²⁸ Ibid, pp. 55-59; Sarasin Viraphol, *Tribute and Profit: Sino-Siamese Trade 1652-1853* (MA, Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 201

¹²⁹ Hong Lysa, *Thailand in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 50

century to the 238 in the middle of nineteenth century.¹³⁰ Likewise Siamese came with the new system of legitimacy and structure of power over the new *muang* network, Minh Mạng continuously promotes for the “cultivation” of the Southerners by introduction of Confucianism, building the roads, citadels to connect the whole kingdom and sending his officers to rule in any corner of the country. He once instructed that, “These days I hear they [Southerners] smoke opium, sing rowdily, gamble, dispute, and like the most brutal violence. These habits inevitable lead to robbery and burglary. As the women are licentious, their behavior is more disgusting. Husbands are already dissipated, then how can they ask for the fidelity of their wives”.¹³¹

Expanding centralization challenges traditional political recognition in many part of the Mekong. The mythical kinship relation between Thai and Lao, for the first time, was violated by the Taksin invasion (1778). Four decades later, the very Rama III placed Lao from the brotherhood to his subjects through the military campaign in 1827. The sack and complete destruction of Vientiane followed, together with a massive resettlement of Lao people on what is now Thai side of Mekong, and in the next few years the Thai brought all the former Vientiane territories under direct administration.¹³² And from then, military infrastructure, road, and fortress were built up to Luang Prabang to the north and several *muang* to the east, close to Dai Nam.¹³³

The 1827 incident in Laos marked a new phrase of competition between Bangkok and Hue. Although there was no direct fighting, Rama III and Minh Mạng’s policies toward Vientiane and other *muang* in the central mekong were clear enough to think of a possible frontier in the central Mekong. It is likely that Siamese had a skillful solution for this political situation when in 1827 depopulating most of settlements in Vientiane as well as refusing to have further military eastward where Vietnamese troops have already set up at Sầm Nưa, Trấn Ninh, Savanakhet. The frontier between those two power networks seems acceptable, even after Siamese

¹³⁰ Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese*, p. 23

¹³¹ MMCY [Abstract of policies of Minh Mạng], trans. by Uy ban dich thuat Phu Quoc Vu Khanh Dac Trach Van Hoa (1897. Sài Gòn: 1972-4), 13:19a

¹³² Walter Vella, *Siam Under Rama III* (Locust Valley, N.Y., 1957)

¹³³ Quốc Sử quán nhà Nguyễn, *Khâm Định Tiểu Bình*, volume 7

administration reached to Vientiane. In response, Vietnam strengthened its tie with a power network based on Lao principalities close to present-day Lao-Vietnamese borderline to prevent Siamese from any further military and political extension. This political situation has maintained for several decades until the coming of French.

Siamese and Vietnamese state-making in Cambodia is the main stage of confrontation in the mainland during the first half of the nineteenth century. The kingdom played as “overlapping zone” for centuries of political division and dependence on Ayutthaya and Nguyễn Cochinchina. They both maintained Cambodia as a vassal state dual overlordship until Rama III and Minh Mạng challenge this traditional recognition. Puangthong suggests that the economic motor is the main theme of the nineteenth century Siamese engagement in Cambodia. As a result, new political policies were set up by Siam in order to carry out economic monopoly.¹³⁴ I also would like to suggest that emergence of early modern state making can possibly be seen as another motion for the Vietnamese and Siamese expedition in Cambodia. The first several attempts tried to break the traditional political network among Siam, Cambodian, and Vietnam came from Siamese in the late of eighteenth century. King Taksin of Thonburi reached to Hatien [Ponthaimas], and King Rama I had a fifty-thousand troop campaign into the Lower Mekong Delta before those had been defeated in 1785/1786.¹³⁵

Unlike Laos, the coherent geography and economic entity of Cambodia makes the kingdom has no possibly acceptable frontier to divide. The kingdom therefore has a different role to play in this dilemma confrontation. The situation was even more tragic for Cambodia as division really came to its court and elite group. Accordingly, any attempt to monopolize Cambodia politically, economically, and militarily would lead to unavoidable conflict because the Cambodia itself has seen as an undivided complex geopolitical and economic entity. All demographic and economic centers, trading sources were linked together among Tonle Sap Lake, Cardamom Mountain, and northern mountain area. Despite such feature, both Rama III and Minh Mạng for a decade consistently tried to annex the whole or part of Cambodia into their political

¹³⁴ Rungswasdisab, Puangthong, *War and Trade* (1995), idem, “Monopolize Cambodian Trade: Siamese Invasion of Hatien in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century”, in *Thailand and Her Neighbours (II)* (Bangkok: Thammasat University Press, 1994), pp. 83-120

¹³⁵ MTGP, pp. 70-77

domain. The most significant attempt was made by Minh Mạng in 1834 when he defeated the Siamese five-army invasion and overcame power in Cambodia. The Cambodian Queen was captured in Sài Gòn and her kingdom then became the thirty-second province of Đại Nam, Trấn Tây thành 鎮西城 or Western Protectorate. Nguyễn dynasty's document shows how this province has been run without exception from the others.

“In the Ming Mạng period [r. 1820–1841], the king of Cao Man had no heir and four of his daughters stood equal and could not rule the country. [Our king] thus ordered the army of Tham Tan, General Trấn Hộ (Pacify and Protect) to prepare rice rations and sent it to the [protecting Vietnamese] government, in order [for it] to [be able to] manage the land and set up [district] administrations there. Eleven prefectures (phủ 府) [are being set up]: Trấn Tây, Nghi Hoà, Nam Ninh, Võ Công, Hà Bình, Mỹ Lâm, Sơn Tĩnh, Hải Đông, Hải Tây, Ninh Thái, and Quảng Biên; and 25 districts (huyện): Phong Nhung, Thượng Phong, Nam Thái, Nam Thịnh, Phù Nam, Kỳ Tô, Thái An, Bình Xiêm, Trung Hà, Chân Tài, Phúc Lai, Hải Ninh, Tập Ninh, Trung Thụy, Mỹ Tài, Hoa Lâm, Quế Lâm, Sơn Đông, Hải Bình, Thâu Trung, Ngọc Bia, Giang Hữu, Nam Thành, and Vĩnh Trường. All these units retain contacts with the [Vietnamese] provinces nearby, the same way that An Biên and Tinh Biên were managed by Hà Tiên, and Ba Xuyên was managed by An Giang”.¹³⁶

Explaining his extraordinary move, Minh Mạng was reportedly to announce that: “Trương Minh Giảng 張明講 once said, the people in Cambodia are plain, even more than the indigenous people in northern Vietnam, I myself do not believe. Today, among those in northern Vietnam, some have engage with the intellectual, some have been known Chinese, [it means that] my power can make them fear, my favor can make them grateful. On the other hand, the Cambodians are insentient, and very difficult to rule them. I knew this [the Khmer rebellion] would be happened some days, fortunately, this time our kingdom is strong, [I would take this opportunity] to launch a decisive mopping-up operation, then to comfort them in order to be free from worries. For those important things such as this, I want to take responsibility thus my sons, my grandsons will be no longer to engage with such troubles”.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Tran Tay Phong Tho Ky, p. 149

¹³⁷ MMCY, Vol. 3, p. 193

In response to the Vietnamese advance, Siamese established its authority in the western part of Cambodia which in some way reflects the same political perform as that of the Vietnamese.¹³⁸ In spite of the fact that those new parts of Siamese domain were characterized as *huamuang chan-nok* [the Outer township] in order to differentiate with *huamuang chan-nai* [the Inner township], Siam Reap, Battambang were under the authority of *Krom mahatthai*, the governors had Thai title and served Bangkok as officials, collecting tax and manpower for Siamese.¹³⁹

In the newly-setting territory, state cultivated its people into subject and transformed rulers became under direct center control. The taxation system, population survey both found in Vietnam's western protectorate and Siam's Inner township of Siam Reap and Battambang. The process of "*Vietnamization*" was promoted in Cambodia as same as the "cultivation" policy Minh Mạng conducted in southern Vietnam. It implies that there is no difference between the periphery and overlapping zone which now was turned into part of the kingdom administration system. The king ordered to the Vietnamese governor of Cambodia, "The Barbarians [in Cambodia] have become my children now, and you [Trương Minh Giảng, governor of the Vietnamese western protectorate] should help them, and teach them our customs. ... And my instructions to you are these; teach them to raise mulberry trees, pigs and ducks. ... As for language, they should be taught to speak Vietnamese. [Our habits of] dress and table manners must also be followed. If there is any outdated or barbarous custom that can be simplified, or repressed, then do so".¹⁴⁰

Conclusion

Between the 1820s and the 1850s, the Mekong valley witnessed one of the largest movements of peoples since the ancient time. Various ethnic groups were voluntary or forced to cross different terrains, frontiers and human landscapes. Most

¹³⁸ See *Phongsawadan khamen* [The Cambodian Chronicle or Nong Chronicle], (Bangkok: Khurusapha, 1963), Kathathon-thoranin (Yia), Chaophraya, "Phongsawadan muang Phratabong [Chronicle of Battambang], (Bangkok: Khurusapha, 1964)

¹³⁹ Puangthong, *War and Trade*, pp. 182-4; NL., CMH, R. III C.S. 1192/4 in *Chotmaihet rachakarn thi sam* [Record of the Third Reign of the Chakri Dynasty], Vol. 5 (Bangkok, Published on the occasion of the 200th birthday of Rama III, 1987), pp. 108-9

¹⁴⁰ DNTL, cited Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, pp. 152-53

of those movements were directly resulted from the impact of centralized expansion through which peoples escaped from warfare, starvation, religious and ethnic suppression. The lack of manpower in the mainland also contributed to this movement when huge number of people was required to feed massive working project such as digging canal, building road, fortress, and being recruited for warfare.¹⁴¹ The population of Siam in 1800 is around four million and reported about 4.75 million in 1825.¹⁴² At the same period of time (1800), Vietnamese population was around 7 million.¹⁴³ Those figures seem far from sufficiency since Bangkok and Hue both required large manpower to build new capital, public works, hydraulic system, and maintaining numerous number of standing army. Therefore, collecting and redistributing peoples in space are the main task of centralization and territorialization.

As a result of massive human fluidity, both Siam and Đại Nam created space for multiethnic and intermingling cultural society. The establishment of Bangkok vividly demonstrates the interminglement of people from the Mekong space. Edward van Roy suggests that under the reign of Rama III, Bangkok's eleven disparate ethnic minorities—Mon, Lao, Khmer, Malay, Cham, South Asian, Vietnamese, Burmese, Thai-Portuguese, and Western—consisting primarily of refugees and war captives from the inlands and merchant mariners and wage workers from overseas, constituted a tableau of discrete settlements that collectively played a vigorous and variegated role in the city's political, social and economic life. The way Bangkok was structured thus reflects the shifting paradigm of the Siamese internal relationship. The ethnic spatial distribution, for instance, settlements assumed a radical pattern around the a sacral center in conformity with their social status, and they divided north and south of the capital's lateral axis in accordance with their respective roles in linking Siam's internal redistributive economy with the external market economy.¹⁴⁴ This kind of

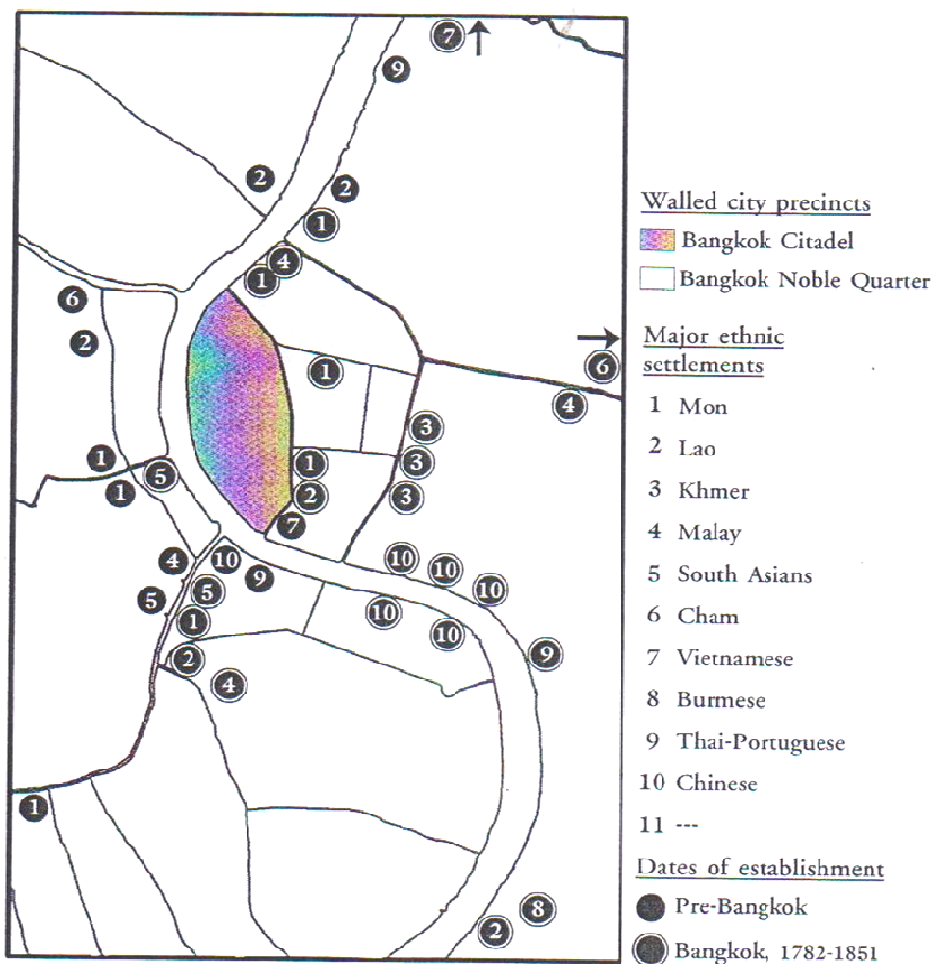
¹⁴¹ James C. Scott, *The Art of not Being Governed*, p. 4

¹⁴² Skinner, *Chinese Society*, pp. 68, 70; Anthony Reid, *Age of Commerce*, Vol. I, p. 14

¹⁴³ Li Tana, *Nguyễn Cochinchina*, pp. 159–72; Yumio Sakurai, “Vietnam After the Age of Commerce” (ms), 1, 3, Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*, Vol. 1, p. 420

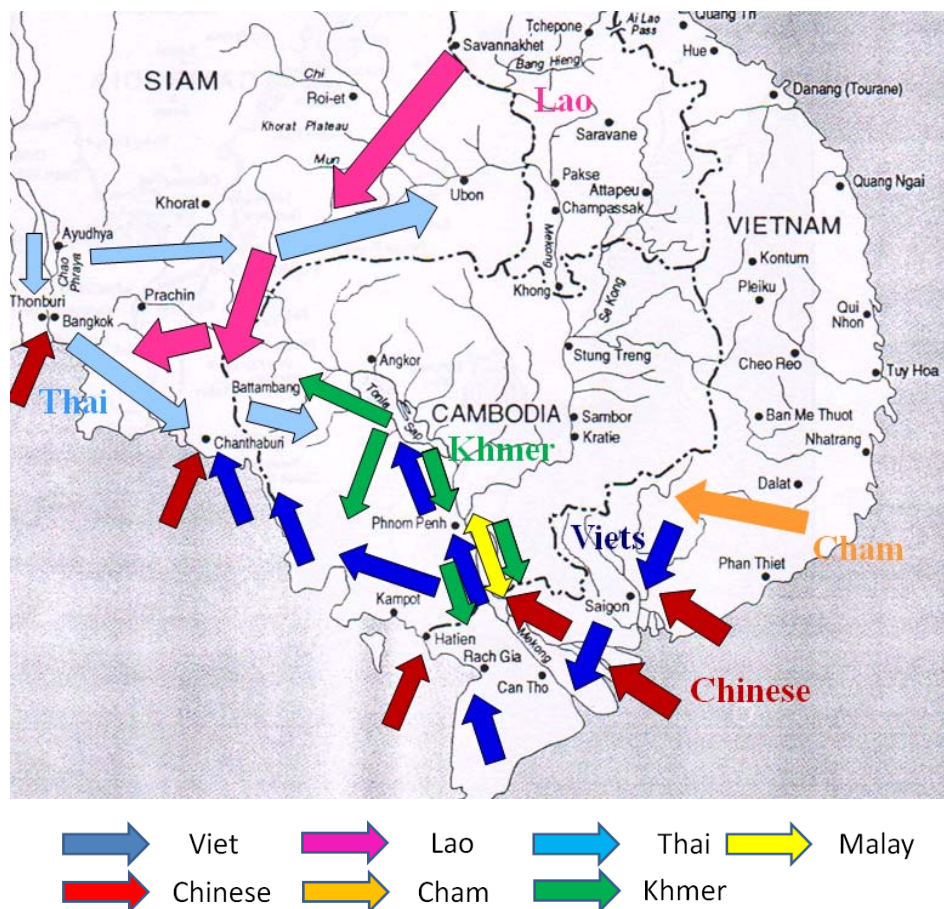
¹⁴⁴ Edward Van Roy. “*Twixt Land and Sea: Bangkok's Plural Society on the Verge of Modernity*”, MS

urban transition to modernity has never been seen at Ayutthaya though both Bangkok and Ayutthaya share the cosmopolitan relatively.¹⁴⁵



Bangkok Notable Ethnic Minority Settlements, 1782-1851,
[Courtesy of Edward Van Roy]

¹⁴⁵ See Derick Garnier. *Ayutthaya: Venice of the East*, Bangkok: River Books, 2004, Michael Wright, Charnvit Kasetsiri. *Discovering Ayutthaya*, Bangkok: Toyota Foundation, 2007; Chris Baker, Old Ayutthaya as a City, *Speech at the Siam Society*, September 20th, 2011, Bangkok. The separability of ethnic settlements in Ayutthaya shows the very traditional way of capital's organization in these old days of Southeast Asia in which those are isolated with each other and located outside the Grand Palace or the Royal Section.



Human mobilization following state cultivation in the Mekong Valley

Source: Mạc Thị Gia Phá (1818), Gia Định Thành Thông Chí (1820), Terwiel (1989), Nicolas Weber (2011, 2012), Li Tana and Nola Cooke (2004), Trần Tây Phong Thổ Ký (2007)...

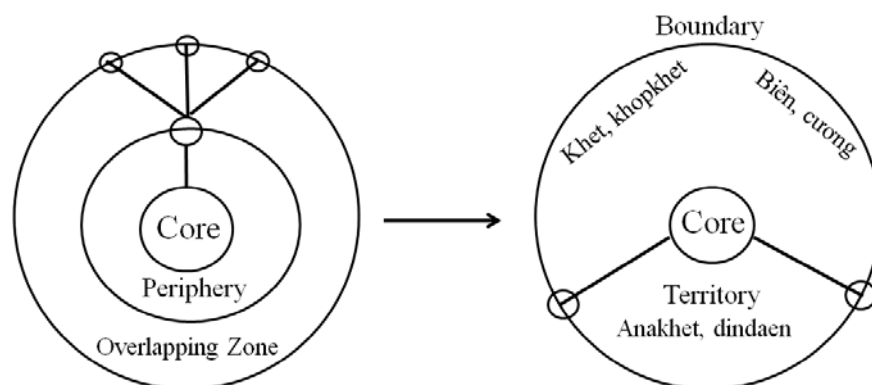
The creation of multiethnic society in the Lower Mekong under the Vietnamese state making offers another image of the ethnic and cultural transition. The Vietnamese central state collected peoples of all ethnics, and then put them together with all the differences of language, culture, and religion. Minh Mạng later on used the same strategy when he expanded control toward the Tai area in the northwest and Cambodia. Vietnamese officials were appointed to rule Cambodia or ethnic zone in order to set up Viet standardization.¹⁴⁶ It is reported that there were

¹⁴⁶ Emmanuel Poisson, *Unhealthy air of the Mountains: Kinh and the Ethnic minority rule on the Sino-Vietnamese frontier from the fifteenth to the twentieth century*, in Martin Gainsborough, ed., *On the Borders of State Power: frontiers in the Greater Mekong* (N. Y: Routledge, 2009), pp. 12-24

larger number of the Vietnamese in Cochinchina and Cambodia, up to Tonle Sap who providing active support for the process of “Vietnamization”¹⁴⁷.

At the peak of the Siamese and Vietnamese centralized expansion, the shifting of power paradigm during the reign of Rama III and Minh Mạng reflects the fundamental transformation of political terrain in the Mekong basin when traditional politics was in changing under the quest of an effective administrative system to manage territory, manpower, and economic resources. Significant scale of military expeditions over Laos and Cambodia launching almost annually during the reign of Rama III and Minh Mạng presents attempt of state in reorganizing geopolitics and setting state institution in the periphery. Those two monarchs experienced the last power shift in the precolonial Mekong’s space. The paradigm of power both sought to establish is the extension of state making to control groups at the frontier and territorialization of space. Bangkok policy toward the western side of the Mekong, Vientiane and western Cambodia are consistently fallen into the same line with Minh Mạng’s administrative reform, sending Viet officials to the mountain where he converted all diverse layers of political management into homogeneous Dai Nam standardization. All those people used to locate outside cultural and ethnic frontier of “civilized Viet” and turned into subjects of the Dai Nam kingdom who were able to cultivate “civilization” through Confucian education, cadastral survey, population registration, taxation, corvee obligation, and *lingua franca*. Following the establishment of state standard, traditional power structure of loyalty network and mandala’s “field of power” were likely broken out, and reconstructed into new form of geopolitics.

¹⁴⁷ Chandler, “An Anti-Vietnamese Rebellion in early Nineteenth Century Cambodia”, in “Facing the Cambodian Past: Selected Essays 1971-1994”, (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1996), pp. 61-75; Chandler, A History of Cambodia, pp. 151-152



Changes in Power Paradigm in Early Nineteenth Century Siam and Dai Nam

The practice of power by Rama III and Minh Mạng, goes beyond the traditional idea of power of Southeast Asian state which more or less comes close to modern political conceptualization of territory, sovereignty. The place of traditional power relationship by administrative system is a crucial change in the early nineteenth century Mekong valley, resulting in introducing contours of new political body to not only Siam and Vietnam but also to Laos and Cambodia. And by this mean, the process takes part in shaping a regional paradigm of power driving by state making and political reidentification upon many places of ambiguous political status. Two among those transformations can be found significant, the coming to an end of the overlapping zone and the placing of the traditional political relationship by administrative network under direct control of centralized kingdom. Always scholarship on Southeast Asia looks for change between the premodern and early modern pattern of state and the political evolution during the time of Rama III and Minh Mạng can be strategically represented for this phenomenon.

The political movement shows a coherent rhythm in the Mekong basin and posed an overwhelming impact on every Tai *ban muang* and every Vietnamese *làng xã* [village] from the lowland to the highland. It is not geographically limited in Siam and Vietnam, but extended over Laos and Cambodia. By this, those centralized kingdoms crossed mountains of the *Zomia* world and tried to provide nationhood for groups in many way were not fully incorporated with state organization in northern Thailand, Khorat Plateau, Vietnamese Central Highland, Muong Phuon, Xieng

Khoang, Boloven Plateau, Champasak.¹⁴⁸ It is not surprising that many of those peoples along the Mekong River adopted with knowledge and technique of state-making from the Thai and Vietnamese as a strategic choice for political survival. In the context of “the last stand of autonomy”, the Khmer movement against Vietnamese and Siamese intervention occurred in form of a “pre-nationalist response”.¹⁴⁹

There is no doubt that changing geopolitics in the Mekong valley has a great stimulation to small principalities in shaping early modern political landscape. It crucially reflects the way peoples in the region responded to the quest of modernity by recognizing, reorganizing, and redefining space with all kinds of human landscape within. It is the first time when the Mekong has gradually transformed into a certain form of modern politics and peoples’ conceptualization of space also reconstructed, coming closer to the contemporary terminologies of geopolitics. Part of the heritages of the Rama III-Minh Mạng paradigm of power is experienced through the wide range of map collection. Those contain authentic geographical knowledge, clear statement of authority, and strategic view of military, economic and political position of places. It is worth noting that during the time of Rama III and Minh Mạng, the Mekong valley for the first time has been put on maps, recognized by cartography, and run by the project of nation-making. Many parts of this cartography then were acknowledged as colonial and modern borderlines and historically became vital for any understanding of introducing “geo-body”, boundary, and territory of modern countries in the Mekong valley.

¹⁴⁸ James C. Scott. The Art of Not Being Governed (2009)

¹⁴⁹ See David Chandler, An Anti-Vietnamese Rebellion (1975)

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis was constructed as a series of related case studies, connected by the theme of early state making project. The phenomenon evoked dynamic political and geopolitical development along the Mekong valley in shaping modern contours of the region by the two main actors of Vietnamese and to the extent, the Siamese. The unprecedented establishment of state in space by expanding of centralization, by creating territorialization, and by producing state institution into complex terrain and margin presented a transitional landscape not only in Vietnam but to some extents, along the Mekong valley.

In this thesis, I described how ethnic and political interaction creates the Mekong valley as a social and political space. Prior to the early nineteenth century, the Mekong geopolitically performed as a “field of power” in which existed various forms of power relationship. Such inhomogeneous political practice had state’s recognition in addition to the geopolitical ambiguity and unidentification of periphery and frontier. By the early nineteenth century, Vietnamese and Siamese centralized expansion gradually challenged the existence of the “field of power” via setting up central direct control of the periphery and standardizing administrative management which approaching closer to the modern form of state organization. Over many parts cross the region, increasing extinguishment of traditional power relationship and replacement of territorialization fundamentally produced a new geopolitical structure throughout the Mekong region by design of state.

Using power of geography and cartography, state could recognize space, practically visualize their project on map, and thus effectively design various categories of state infrastructure. It is also involved with unprecedented human movement and resettlement along state institution network. For several decades, the Vietnamese and Siamese both found partly successes by converting mountain, fallow, swamp, and amphibious terrain with new human landscape and economic structure in

incomparable scale which the region never experienced before. Hundred thousands of people were collected and removed under these managements. Infrastructure and state authority then came in producing administrative units as a result of centralized design.

In spite of the clear awareness that the phenomenon was unfinished and a larger scale of state-making can be found in a sequent period, this thesis suggested of a new political tendency region-wide rather than a complete transformation of centralized state in the Mekong valley. The difference between Dai Nam and Siam also worth to be noted here as one obviously saw in the later period, Siamese political reform in western-style would fundamentally reconstruct the country's administrative system by which a "full-version" of modern nation state gradually emerged. However, the trend can be traced back as far as half century earlier which both Hué and Bangkok presented a strong sense of building state institution along the Mekong. The expanding state-making based on transforming natural and human landscape and resettling peoples of all ethnics intermingling. The process was designed by central state through creating of nation-building establishment. James Scott recently suggests a model of interaction between the valley kingdom and highlanders of *Zomia*. He points out that the moving of state-making toward the highland is much later and more challenging for valley kingdom in order to climb up to higher terrain. The reason is that highlanders could move back and forth over the vast periphery to escapes.¹ This thesis however revealed different angle of state building in a more diverse elements of complex terrain and multiethnic atmosphere. It indicated that geographies of knowledge and infrastructure of state making are fundamental for centers to facilitate the invasion of space. And the capability to resettle people in large scale would allow state to reorganize geopolitical structure by establishing its various elements. Thus, how far state could reach very much depends on the number of manpower could be collected at the frontier.

Centralization coming to central Mekong and southwest Indochina produced a number of significant changes in shaping the contours of modern nations of Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Two among those are the reconstruction of

¹ James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University, 2009)

geopolitical recognition and multiethnic transition. The space between Bangkok and Sài Gòn for instance, has been long in the status of ambiguous political and ethnic identity. The coming of state puts the region on very “proto-national” map and therefore, those areas used to be geographically and politically considered as invisible and marginal, then came under light of “geographies of knowledge” and “politics of recognition” by surrounding central states. This was the departure point to reconstruct different political space and coming to the modern notions of boundary and territorial control also was introduced, and by this mean ambiguous and inhomogeneous political identity in the region was significantly extinguished in presenting a new structure of surface orientation and politics of land.

Given the transformation as a new regional political phenomenon, this thesis suggests that it would not be comprehensively understood if one follows the traditional models in narrating increasing centralized expansion and territorialialization along the Mekong. Socio-political and economic changes have to be recognized by scholarship, especially internal change as a result of local response to the quest of modernity and colonial threat. In this thesis, by using the notion of early modern state-making, it is allowed scholarship to rethink of geopolitical space as a contingent device, not as fixed categories, even within national boundary. Those modern borders are politically products of human imagination during the last two hundred years and early nineteenth century Vietnam or Siam witnessed one of the first steps of this transition under the process of “early state making”. Therefore, it limits our understanding of precolonial discourse of the mainland’s geopolitics by using contemporary political science’s conceptualization of boundary and sovereignty.

Defining and constructing different layers of political organization in various physical and human terrains in various times, it is obvious that state-building is never easy for Siamese and Vietnamese whose success has not been always found. Heritage of modern Thailand and Vietnam nation state can be traced back to the early decades of the nineteenth century when the production of losing-territory assumption starts. The model of colliding state-making proposed in this thesis helps to draw a clear

connection between different categories of spatial politics in time and to answer for the task of how to re-explain pre-colonial story of national building, the narrative is still dominated agenda on the regional diplomatic table among the Mekong's neighboring countries.

Characteristics of the middle nineteenth century Mekong's landscape have not only been solidly gone through this period of time and but also maintained along the colonial project in the mainland. The establishment of French Indochina and their negotiation with British were basically based on political negotiation resulting from the early nineteenth century Siamese-Vietnamese mediation. One of the significant features along the Mekong river is the deconstruction of traditional power relationship which lasted for thousand year. Early nineteenth century state in Vietnam was in transition of breaking down traditional power relationship between the Vietnamese and other ethnics as well as regional integration. The new structure likely reaches beyond the Nguyễn's capacity to manage because of enormously diverse ethnic, social, and political landscape along thousand miles of eastern mainland. However, it is worth to remind the significance of the political movement during the first half of the nineteenth century in shaping modern Vietnamese geopolitics./

GLOSSARY

Place names

Bắc Hà	北河
Đại Cồ Việt	大瞿越
Đại Nam	大南
Đại Việt	大越
Gia Định	嘉定
Hà Nội	河內
Hà Tiên	河僊
Hưng Hóa	興化
Lạc Việt	雒越
Nam Chưông	南掌 [Luang Prabang]
Nam Kỳ	南圻
Tây Sơn	西山
Thăng Long	昇龍
Trấn Tây thành	鎮西城
Trung Kỳ	中圻
Vạn Tượng	萬象 [Vientiane kingdom/muang]
Việt Nam	越南
Xiêm la	暹羅國 [Siam]

Terms and Expressions

Cải thổ lưu quy	[gaitu guiliu] 改土歸流
Đạo	道
Địa bạ	地簿
Jimi	羈糜
Huyện	縣
Thổ ty	土司
Nhu Viễn	柔遠
Phủ	府
Sĩ phu bắc hà	士夫北河
Tỉnh	省
Sakoku (Tỏa quốc)	鎖国
Trấn	鎮
Triều cống	朝貢
Xã	社

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Lê Văn Duyệt 黎文悅

Lý Văn Phức 李文馥

Mạc Cửu 鄭玖

Mạc Thiên Tứ 鄭天賜

Ngô Thì Nhậm 吳時任
Nguyễn Cư Trinh 阮居楨
Nguyễn Huệ 阮惠
Nguyễn Nhạc 阮岳
Nguyễn Lữ 阮侶
Nguyễn Hữu Chỉnh 阮有整
Nguyễn Kim 阮淦
Nguyễn Phúc Ánh 阮福暎
Nguyễn Trãi 阮薦
Nguyễn Văn Siêu 阮文超
Minh Mạng 明命
Phạm Đình Hổ 范廷琥
Phạm Thận Duật 范慎燾
Phan Huy Chú 潘輝注
Phan Thúc Trục 潘叔直
Quang Trung 光中皇帝
Thiệu Trị 紹治
Thoại Ngọc Hầu 瑞玉侯
Tống Phước Ngoạn 宋福玩
Trịnh Hoài Đức 鄭懷德
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