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The Vietnam - Chenla - Siam relationship triangle: Approach from the foreign policy of King Gia Long (1802-1820)

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Abstract

In the early of the 19th century, Vietnam and Siam played a strong dominant role on the Indochina peninsula. Vietnam is constantly expanding its influence to the West to create a security-space for the Southern land. Siam is also continually enlarged its influence to the East to annex land and increase its influence abroad. Meanwhile, Chenla is located between two powerful forces, so it is increasingly threatened and dependent. Between these three countries, there exist complex types of power interactions, affecting the existence and development of each country. The article focuses on analyzing the triangular relationship between Vietnam - Chenla - Siam approach from the foreign policy of King Gia Long (1802-1820) to clarify efforts to protect and maintain peaceful space in the border areas in the Southwest of Vietnam faced the threat from Siam during this period.

Keywords: Chenla, King Gia Long, Relationship Triangle, Siam, Vietnam

Introduction

In the early 19th century, Vietnam and Siam were two strong countries and played an important role in maintaining peace and stability in mainland Southeast Asia. Chenla is an old country but has a weaker position in competition with Vietnam and Siam. Hence, Chenla became the place where Vietnam and Siam deployed foreign policies to enhance their position and role in the region.

Geo-strategic, Vietnam - Chenla - Siam has contiguous territory and territorial waters within a unified geographical entity within mainland Southeast Asia. Three countries are considered the gateway to Southeast Asia and have a central location in this region. The intimate attachment of geostrategic location makes the relationship between the three countries soon formed, developed and transformed through many ups and downs of history. Vietnam - Chenla - Siam have created a complex intertwined relationship based on the balance of power and forces between the three countries. In the triangle relationship between Vietnam - Chenla - Siam, Chenla is the country most affected by external factors, the existence and development of Chenla is directly affected by the foreign policies of Vietnam and Siam.

The relationship between Vietnam - Chenla - Siam is unstable due to internal fluctuations in each country. This issue strongly affects the balance of forces between the three countries, making an important contribution to shaping the balance of power of the trilateral relationship. Of the three peaks of the Vietnam-Chenla-Siam relationship triangle, Siam and Vietnam are the two major forces that completely dominate this rapport. Both Siam and Vietnam approach relations with the Chenla with ambitions for power and the expansion of influence abroad, including territorial expansion (Song Jung Nam, 2008, p.44). In this triangle of power, each country with its own strength has created an asymmetry in the balance of forces between Vietnam and Siam compared to Chenla.

In 1802, the Nguyen Dynasty was founded by Gia Long – Nguyen Anh. Gia Long constantly strengthens the domestic situation and enhances the country's position in the region. In particular, foreign policy with neighboring countries is also focused. Gia Long has always considered foreign policy as an important measure to maintain national security in Vietnam's southwestern border region.

Gia Long has relied on the actual balance of power in the region to have foreign policies suitable for Siam and Chenla.

Siam in the Gia Long's Foreign Policy (1802-1820)

From the end of 18th century, the Chakri Dynasty (Rattanakosin) was established with the reign of King Rama I. The Kingdom of Siam had become a powerful feudal state in Southeast Asia. Siam quickly took advantage of the opportunity, relying on its powerful power to expand eastward, constantly expanding its territory by force against Laos, Chenla and Vietnam (Vu Duong Ninh, 1994, p.78) ^[15]. By the time King Rama II succeeded him, Siam had fully established a system of territories and domains stretching from Chenla to Laos. Bangkok took control and established the Protectorate in Chenla. The Chenla monarchs during this period were all ordained in Bangkok. During the reign of the Rama I king, the King of Chenla - Ang Eng had to cut off the land, ceding to Siam the provinces of Battambang and Siem Reap.

Nevertheless, from 1806, Chenla King - Ang Chan II redirects from subservience to submission to Vietnam. In September 1807, Ang Chan II dictate Oc Nha Vi Bon Rach to apply for a title of general, confession of god to the Nguyen Dynasty. Gia Long approved and minted the seal "King of Cambodia" to prepare the investiture. According to the Great Southern Convention, "The seal is of gilded silver, with a lion-shaped knob, a box for brass lipstick..." (Cabinet of the Nguyen Dynasty, 1993, p.542) ^[9]. This fact is similarly noted by Chenla historians: "Vietnam recognized the new king when Cambodia professed god to the Hue court, tribute every three years" (Le Huong, 1970, p.97) ^[6]. The Nguyen Dynasty minted the "gilded silver seal, with a camel knob", and at the same time for the drafting ceremony of the proclamation mantra issued to prepare for the completion of the maple book (National History of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p.707) ^[11]. This was an important diplomatic event, so the Nguyen Dynasty informed Chenla of the time of the Vietnamese ambassador's arrival so that Chenla could prepare for the procession. That seal of "Cambodian monarch" was brought to Chenla by the Vietnamese mission to proclaim the King of Chenla in Lovek.

This incident was not merely an ordained diplomatic event of the Nguyen Dynasty with the King of Chenla but officially initiated Vietnam's relationship with Chenla in order to balance of power with the Kingdom of Siam. King Gia Long sent two armies to stay on duty in Chenla, the An Bo team led by Hoang Van Linh and the Cuong Bo team led by Tran Quang Luong to capture the situation in time and inform the command center in Gia Dinh to handle when it comes to the terrible situation (National History of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p.738) ^[11]. Everything involved politics, the military, and the defense of Chenla, the king of this country informed the Hue court.

Gia Long considers Siam a country with equal strength to Vietnam, it is essential to establish a flexible and reasonable relationship derived from the principle of Vietnam's national interests. Vietnam - Siam relations during this period were considered symmetrical. Gia Long advocated continuing to maintain excellent relations with Siam. In terms of relation, the Nguyen Dynasty always considered itself a "commodity" country (National History of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007b, p.78) ^[12] with them and "shared a wide strip of sea, united in the same sky" in relations (Phan Khoang, 1970, p.6) ^[10]. Gia Long commenced with Siam a peaceful, flexible, conditional

and principled relationship. The Nguyen Dynasty was judicious in maintaining a peaceful state of amiable relations, using all means to sustain stable relations between the two countries. The Nguyen Kings took advantage of all abilities and media, consisting of bribes with material money, to achieve this goal (Chaophraya Thiphakorawong, 1990) ^[2]. Gia Long's way of resolving the Siam - Chenla conflict in the triangle between Vietnam - Chenla - Siam is a peaceful and appeasement when essential on the basis of strengthening national defense, because according to Gia Long, the issue of "Chenla country" in relations with Siam is a "concern to the South" of the Nguyen Dynasty (Dinh Thi Dung, 2001) ^[4].

Gia Long tries to let Vietnam - Siam relations not be disrupted by the Chenla issue. From 1807 to 1810, the King of Siam - Rama II relentlessly put pressure on Chenla to remove Ang Chan II. In 1810, Ang Chan II's three younger brothers, Ang Snguon, Ang Em, and Ang Duong, returned from Siam. Wanting to compete for power with Ang Chan II, he asked Siam for help. Siam forced Ang Chan II to divide the land among the children. At the same time, Rama II made Ang Chan II send one thousand troops to Siam, of which, 3,000 troops were sent ahead to Bangkok to await orders to fight the Burmese army (Myanmar) at Mueang Thaland. Ang Chan II suspected Kralahom Moeung of treason and colluded with Siam, so he killed him and hurriedly sent an envoy to Ma-A-man Si to deliver a letter to Gia Dinh for help. With Vietnam's military help, Chenla in turn eliminated threats, secured the border, and avoided wars with Siam. As a result, Ang Chan II grew closer and closer to Vietnam and separate from Siam.

However, Gia Long has always been cautious in his relations with Siam. Gia Long did not want to cause tension in his relations with Siam. In 1816, Gia Long made it clear that "not wanting to provoke aggression at sea, he sent Ang Chan II an envoy to Siam" and said: "Your country for Siam, take small water to worship big water for a long time. Now, although the king does not personally visit, he should also send envoys as before, not before the back but after silver" (National History of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p.923) ^[11]. In 1830, King Minh Mang, when dealing with Siamese aggression in Chenla, said:

"We and Siam also maintain the same peace, otherwise they provoke themselves first, whoever is right and who is left is clear, prepare to send the right and the right to divide to occupy the towns of Chau Doc and Ha Tien, raise the prestige first to suppress and dissipate their evil heart. If they insist on coming to invade us, they will immediately send troops to fight the enemy".

(National History of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007b, p.154) ^[12]

Consequently, Chenla joined Siam in communion. Nonetheless, Siam still took actions that harmed the rule of Ang Chan II. In 1811, after unsuccessfully asking Siam to win the throne with Ang Chan II, Ang Snguon fled to Pursat, many of Chenla's fugitive sinners followed, repaired their weapons for self-defense and asked to cut off the land of 3 districts including Krakor, Khlong, Kray (Phu Ca Khu, Phu Heart, Phu Trung) to dwell in. Then, Ang Snguon sent someone to ask for help with Siam. King Rama II sent general Chao Phraya Yommaraj Noi who was stationed in Battambang to await orders to attack Chenla. Ang Chan II saw that the situation was critical and sent someone to report

the situation urgently to Gia Dinh City. Viceroy Nguyen Van Nhan brought up the work. King Gia Long projected that:

“The Siamese army that had retreated before is now back, I don't know what I mean. Ang Chan II is my anger, if there is a postponement, it is impossible to sit and watch, but the soldiers cannot be moved. So he sent the Governor of Dinh Tuong, Nguyen Van Thoai, to bring troops to Lovek, saying that the buoy was to collect wood for underground aid”. (National History of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p.830) ^[11].

In March 1812, hostilities between Siam and Chenla began to intensify. The Siamese general - Chao Phraya Yommaraj Noi divided his army into two navigation - heading directly to Lovek Palace under the guidance of Ang Snguon (Khin Sok, 1991, p.75) ^[5]. Ang Em and Ang Duong both fled to the Siamese. Ang Chan II fled to Phnom Penh and was taken by Nguyen Van Thoai to Gia Dinh to escape. Nguyen Van Thoai was ordered by Gia Long to station troops at Lvea Aem (Lo Yem) to help the Chenla people flee inland. The governor of Gia Dinh, Nguyen Van Nhan, brought it back to the court. King Gia Long descended:

Your brothers don't get along, which cause a big concern among citizens. Now that the king has relied on me, I will have a solution to settle the situation. When there is no concern, your return to your country will be feasible. (National History of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p.835) ^[11]

At the same time, King Gia Long sent a letter to blame Siam for causing troubles. King Siam sent the envoy to meet and ask for reconciliation. Gia Long blamed:

Your country raised an army for no reason and forced Ang Chan to leave, and now you use an excuse to reconcile? Chenla will forever be my servant, and therefore I will take the responsibility. Go and tell your King that Ang Chan II has to return. If your King stops lying to me and causing trouble for Ang Chan, good relationship with neighbors and other small countries will be maintained. (National History of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p.840) ^[11]

Gia Long's reproach implicitly meant to frighten Siam and always assert that Chenla was a colony of Vietnam. In response to Vietnamese support for Chenla, the Siamese temporarily ceased fighting to assess the situation to avoid confronting the Nguyen. Moreover, at this time the Siamese army was also at war with Burma (Myanmar). In early 1813, King Rama II sent an envoy, Chau Phraya Maha Animat, to Gia Dinh citadel to present the national letter and then follow the station to the capital Hue to worship King Gia Long with the implication of finding a political solution to the Chenla problem:

Previously, the Ang Chan II brothers did not get along with each other, preparing their weapons to fight, harming the flesh and blood grace of the two great countries, I advised them make peace with each other. Unexpectedly, Ang Chan II was skeptical and brought his family away. The Siamese army sealed the treasure, repaired the ramparts to wait for their return without any other intentions. Now, when Ang Chan II ran to Gia

Dinh to ask for help from your Majesty to handle the situation, King Siam did not dare to disobey orders. (National History of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p.846) ^[11].

In March 1813, Gia Long sent Le Van Duyet and Ngo Nhan Tinh to send more than 13,000 men to bring back the King of Chenla, Ang Chan II, accompanied by the Siamese mission Chau Phraya Maha Animat. At the same time, in order for Ang Chan II to wholeheartedly trust Vietnam, Gia Long persuaded Ang Chan II that:

Bringing the King back was not the intention of King Siam. The reason why Siamese had to escort you is to avoid conflicts later. If the Siamese are distrustful and cause strife, it's their fault. I have considered everything carefully, please don't get me wrong. (National History of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p.846) ^[11].

Faced with the support of the Vietnamese army for Chenla, the Siamese army temporarily stopped fighting to review the situation to avoid confrontation with the Nguyen army. Ang Chan II returned to Lovek citadel. Although Siam did not dare to resist, it still kept its troops in Battambang, secretly waiting for an opportunity to attack the Vietnamese army. Gia Long recently wrote a letter of reprimand with tough words, and also clearly analyzed the situation for the King of Siam. The words in the letter along with the prestige of the Nguyen army made the Siamese army not dare to act rashly, so they withdrew their troops.

After Ang Chan II returned to live in Lovek citadel, the Nguyen army saw that Lovek was small and narrow and difficult to defend if the Siamese soldiers attacked, so General Le Van Duyet proposed to repair Phnom Penh citadel to bring Ang Chan II back to rule (National History Office of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p.861) ^[11]. Realizing that the proposal was reasonable because helping Chenla defend was also helping himself, King Gia Long persuaded Le Van Duyet to command the construction of Phnom Penh citadel, Lvea Aem citadel and building An Bien castle to help Chenla stop the enemy.

In 1814, after the work was completed, Le Van Duyet ordered the army to withdraw to Gia Dinh, leaving only more than 1,000 troops commanded by Nguyen Van Thoai to support the protection of Ang Chan II and guard the attacked by Siamese army. At the same time, King Gia Long also sent a letter to pressure the Siamese army to withdraw to Battambang (National History Office of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, pp. 860, 861) ^[11].

Besides, King Gia Long also issued a decree to Nguyen Van Thoai that Chenla country's affairs should be left to them to “adjudicate themselves without interference... Only the drafting of chapters and dispatches can be carefully reviewed and adapted, then submitted, to make it consistent with the situation” (National History Office of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p.883) ^[11]. This proves that Vietnam's protection work with Chenla under Gia Long's reign was not beyond the purpose of supporting Chenla, helping to stabilize the situation in the country.

Faced with Siam's pressure, Ang Chan II did not want to establish relations with this country. Siam tried to pressure Chenla and repeatedly sent envoys to Vietnam to ask Ang Chan II to communicate. The Siam envoy said:

Vietnamese government treated Chenla very well, and I would be really grateful. But Ang Chan II was originally under submission to Siam, if Ang Chan II did not want to build relation with Siam, Siam would not sent back Ang Snguon. (National History Office of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p.885) ^[11].

At the same time, to increase pressure on Chenla, Siam sent 300 soldiers and 50 boats to attack Battambang. The leader of Gia Dinh citadel heard the secret news and told Nguyen Van Thoai to bring troops and elephants to patrol the border. In addition, King Gia Long ordered The leader of Gia Dinh citadel: "...to draw a map of the roads from Phnom Penh to the envoys of Pursat, Can Vot and Xui Mai as an offering to clearly grasp the current traffic situation and locations of important guardhouse the most important locations" (National History Office of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, pp. 889, 890) ^[11].

Gia Long believes that Vietnam and Siam inherently have good relations, more than half of the troubles are peaceful, the people are resting, do not want to tire the generals, not wanting to worry about the next generation for the sake of a Chenla country, he issued an edict for Ang Chan II to communicate with Siam. Upon receiving the letter, Ang Chan II did not dare to disobey his orders and immediately communicated with Siam to resume filial relations (Le Thi My Trinh, 2009, pp. 150, 151) ^[17].

Thus, the rebalance in diplomatic relations between Vietnam - Chenla - Siam has been re-established. Gia Long not only maintains friendly relations with Siam, but also implements a protection policy in Chenla to turn Chenla into as "fence" protecting the Southwest region, contributing to maintaining independence and territorial integrity in the south of Vietnam.

Chela in the Gia Long's Foreign Policy (1802-1820)

Towards Vietnam, Chenla is not only a "fence" but also a strategic location for direct interactions between Vietnam and Siam to establish and maintain long-term influence on Chenla to push out the war, far from the Vietnam border. Gia Long has established a dual-purpose relationship with Chenla: both as an ally and as a "fence" to protect the country on the Southwest border against the threat of Siam's invasion. Based on his strength, Gia Long implemented a policy of "protection" of Chenla simulating the foreign policy principle of "Big - Small country" through the appointment Ang Chan II - King of Chenla.

Chenla was recognized as a bridge connecting two neighboring countries Vietnam - Siam, with Vietnam to the East and Siam to the West. Chenla had rich lands connected by the flow of the Mekong. Tonlé Sap Lake provides abundant aquatic resources, creating favorable conditions for fishing industry to develop quite well. In addition, Chenla also had a rich source of precious forest products such as sandalwood, nutmeg, antler, ivory, agarwood, etc. The Iron Mountain (Phnom Dek) provided a lot of minerals, of which the most valuable ones are gold and silver (Nguyen Van Luan, 2017) ^[8]. Chenla owned part of the Gulf of Siam (known as the Gulf of Thailand), the important trading road for Chenla to trade with many other countries independently. The waters of Chenla hold a prime position in controlling the Gulf of Siam. These are geopolitical advantages that not all countries in the region have. Therefore, Chenla quickly became a strategic location for the competition of influence of the two rising nations in the early 19th century, Vietnam

and Siam (Trocki, 2009, p. 339) ^[14].

For Vietnam, exerting influence on Chenla land was part of the strategic defense system in the country's Southwest border region. Le Van Duyet said: "If Siam wants to get Chenla, it must use Ang Chan II as a precious commodity, but if we want to protect the land of Gia Dinh, we must use Ang Chan II as a guardian" (National History Office of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p. 860) ^[11]. Gia Long has promoted the defense relationship with Chenla not for the purpose of conquering land, people or wealth, but mainly for self-defense and defense support for Chenla to maintain the peace of the two countries (National History of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, pp.866-867) ^[11]. Besides, King Gia Long also did not want to interfere in Chenla's internal affairs but wanted them to resolve it themselves (National History Office of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p.883) ^[11].

Gia Long has always played the role of a "Big country" in protecting Chenla and balancing power with Siam. Faced with Siam's aggressive actions, Gia Long repeatedly supported and assisted Chenla in terms of prestige and military strength in the face of Siam's oppression and military threats. Gia Long has maintained Vietnam's military presence in Chenla since 1807 (National History Office of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p.738) ^[11] as the strongest way to restrain the ambitions of the Siamese army. If today, within the framework of international laws, it is a rare phenomenon for one country to station troops in another country, then from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, this was a common phenomenon shows the complexity in relations between feudal countries.

Gia Long considered Chenla as an important factor, a strategic outpost in the effort to prevent the Siamese army's ambition to "Advances East". Therefore, in relations with Chenla, King Gia Long paid special emphasis on establishing interoperable defense bases between the two countries to achieve mutual goals of supporting each other in times of change. The army and people of Vietnam - Chenla have worked together to build many military projects on Chenla land and along the border of the two countries such as: Phnom Penh citadel, Lvea Aem citadel, An Bien station, Chau Doc station, Vinh Te canal..., Gia Long also emphasized maintaining defense contacts between the two countries by building many communication stations from Chenla to the Vietnam border to promptly announce news between the two countries. (National History Office of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p.860) ^[11].

Vietnam has persisted in a consistent diplomatic policy to maintain influence over Chenla to create a "fence" area to build a peaceful space and push the war away from the Southwest border region. Vietnam also constantly tries to reconcile its relationship with Siam on the principles of bilaterality, independence, and territorial integrity of the country to maintain peace and friendship between the two countries. However, Vietnam also had times when it was very determined to protect the nation's legitimate interests against Siam's brutal encroachment (Dang Van Chuong, 2003, p.1) ^[3]. Therefore, Vietnam engaged in national defense wars against the Siamese invaders to uphold national justice and preserve the homeland's territorial integrity on the southwest border. All guidelines and policies in the diplomatic relationship between Vietnam - Chenla - Siam have created an important source of external resources, greatly contributing to the defense of the Nguyen Dynasty on the Southwest border during the period 1802-1820.

Aimed to protect Chenla from Siam's aggression, Gia Long sent Nguyen Van Nhan to invade Phnom Penh and strengthen border patrols to regularly monitor every action of Siam. This made the Siamese army not dare to mobilize troops (National History Office of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, pp.799-800)^[11]. Nguyen Van Nhan brought troops to Longvek and told the people that: "Recently because King of Chenla was newly crowned, there was discord in the country, the court sent a general to protect" and was to help Chenla quell the internal rebellion (National History of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p.804)^[11]. At the same time, to highlight the legitimacy of this activity, Nguyen Van Nhan issued six prohibitions with the content:

1. Any situation outside the boundary, important things should be sent to the general to advise, normal things should only be reported. As for the minor generals, they were not allowed to meet the Chenla king, nor were they allowed to travel privately with the Chenla mandarins.
2. The fishermen in the Chenla rivers and lagoons should not seek to exchange for cheap prices.
3. Boats traveling on official business may not carry private goods, nor may they be accompanied by merchant boats for profit.
4. Military officers stationed in the camp are not allowed to arbitrarily enter people's houses and overbearingly harass them.
5. When military officials go, they must not bring Vietnamese people to mix with them in the street market in Chenla and then talk nonsense about military affairs.
6. Military supplies and provisions are already in the transport and supply cities. If Chenla country offers any supplies, they must not be accepted indiscriminately.

(National History Office of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p.802)^[11].

When Ang Chan II came to welcome and asked the army to attack Battambang, Nguyen Van Nhan reports news to Hue capital. King Gia Long ordered Nguyen Van Nhan to "station troops in place, do not take action, leisurely watch the situation, be careful not to carelessly deploy troops" because Vietnam secretly supported Chenla to keep from having a war that would affect security secure the southwest border, not go to war. At the same time, King Gia Long also instructed King Ang Chan II to establish an army so that "when there is no work, we should guard and defend ourselves, and when there is work, we should fight against the enemy, that is truly good strategy and defense of the country". In addition, the Nguyen Dynasty also appointed the new Governor of Vinh Thanh, Luu Phuoc Tuong, the new Governor of Dinh Tuong, Nguyen Van Thoai, and Mac Van To to lead 1,200 soldiers, advancing to the Lovek army, following Nguyen Van Nhan on duty (National History Office of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p.804)^[11].

Siam general - Chao Phraya Yommaraj Noi saw that the Nguyen army had strengthened its defenses, so it was stationed in Battambang and did not dare to act rashly. The balance was established, Chenla's national safety from the threat from Siam was eliminated. In 1811, Chao Phraya Yommaraj Noi sent a letter to Ang Chan II saying, "Previously, because Burma invaded, we asked for military aid. Now that Burma has retreated, we have stopped calling for troops" (National History Office of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p.805)^[11]. Realizing that the matter had been resolved satisfactorily, Gia Long ordered Nguyen Van Nhan to

withdraw his troops to Gia Dinh to complete the mission of conquering Phnom Penh. Ang Chan II used the excuse that the new country was peaceful and the people were not at peace, so he asked for troops to protect him. King Gia Long ordered Nguyen Van Ton to bring 1,000 soldiers from Uy Vien garrison there (National history shop of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p.805)^[11].

In protectionism, Vietnam consistently tries to minimize interference in Chenla's internal affairs. The Nguyen Dynasty always induced the protectorates to let King Chenla handle the affairs of his own country. In 1817, Ang Chan II brought the corruption of Chen Lap's servant (Cao La Ham Bien) to the court and asked Vietnam for advice. Gia Long said: "This is the internal affair of your country, there is an official order of Chenla. Your King does not need to ask for permission, just refers to the law of your country" (National History of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, pp.943 - 944)^[11].

In November 1820, Ang Chan II saw that the official Chauvea Tuon Pha was rebellious and immoral, and wanted to ask Gia Dinh to judge. King Nguyen also thought that it was Chenla mandarin, so he let King Chenla govern himself. When Ang Chan II asked to personally consult Vietnam about political affairs, Gia Long also happily accepted to help with the purpose of "promoting and guiding (King Chenla) to diligence" (National History of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p.951)^[11].

As a result, with the protection and help of Vietnam, peace in Chenla was basically reestablished until the end of King Gia Long (1820). As the ambassador of Chenla once stated that: "Our country can keep the land and the people safe, all thanks to the grace of the royal court (Nguyen dynasty) to protect" (National History of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p.824)^[11]. After the death of King Gia Long, Minh Mang was wrought to the throne, continuing to implement the policy of relations with Siam and Chenla.

Conclusions

In the early of the 19th century, Vietnam - Chenla - Siam relations strongly influenced the diplomatic, military and political issues of the three countries. In that triangle of power, based on real strength policy, Vietnam and Siam play the main roles on the political stage of the Indochina region. Meanwhile, Chenla, with its weak strength, became a strategic location for Siam and Vietnam's attempts to seek power and influence abroad. David Chandler (2007)^[1] also observed:

After 1810 King Chan and his advisers were swept up into a game of power politics that they had little chance to change and no opportunity to win.... In Vietnamese terms, Cambodia was a fence, a buffer state. To the Thai, the Cambodians were fellow Buddhist children basking in a fund of Chakri merit who could provide cardamom for the court and manpower for Chakri wars. The Thai demanded service and friendship, but they were usually unable, given the way they organized their armies and the distance between Bangkok and Phnom Penh, to provide protection. The Vietnamese, on the other hand, provided protection of a sort.... (Chandler, 2007, p.138)^[1].

In terms of power, Siam is Vietnam's biggest counterweight in vying for influence in Chenla as well as having a strong impact on relations between the three countries. This

triangular relationship is sometimes peaceful and sometimes tense, so conflicts and wars between the parties during this period are inevitable. In that relationship, Chenla must rely on Vietnam to fight Siam.

From a foreign policy perspective, Vietnam always has a clear orientation regarding its cooperation with Chenla and Siam. Vietnam always perseveres in the principle of establishing a peaceful space for coexistence, but when conflicts become irresolvable and lead to war, we resolutely fight to the end to protect the country and its people, and maintain stability ensure national independence and maintain the Chenla "fence" area to create a forward base for the Southwestern border region against invading and war-provoking forces.

With Siam, the Nguyen Dynasty had established official diplomatic relations since 1807. In the early Nguyen Dynasty, characteristics of the diplomatic policy of towards Siam were harmony and flexibility with consistent conditions and principles clearly, especially issues related to Vietnam's national interests and territorial sovereignty. The Nguyen Dynasty was also very careful to maintain peace in filial relations, using all means to maintain and harmonize diplomatic relations to create stability and peace between the two countries of Vietnam - Siam. To deal with complex issues in regional relations such as the "Chenla problem", the Nguyen Dynasty also skillfully avoided touching Siam, trying to maintain a neutral attitude until the last limit.

In general, during the process of diplomatic relations between Vietnam and Siam from 1802 to 1820, the two countries brought many bilateral benefits, greatly contributing to creating a tradition of friendly relations between the two neighboring countries, shared maritime border and benefits with Chenla (Cambodia) from the early 19th century until now. The Nguyen Dynasty deliberately built bilateral relations between Vietnam and Siam to practically meet the country's defense work, making an important contribution to resolving conflicts between countries in the region as well as creating the success of the country contribution in the process of defending the nation's country in the Southwest border region against mainland Southeast Asian countries in the 19th century.

For Chenla, the outstanding feature of Vietnam - Chenla relations is Vietnam's military presence on Chenla soil. The fact that King Gia Long sent troops to guard Chenla was seen for many reasons:

First, every time the country was in danger from threats and attacks from Siam, King Chenla - Ang Chan II sent letters entreat help and protection from the Nguyen Dynasty army as in 1811, 1812, 1814, 1820. Vietnam always approached Chenla in the spirit: "Nac Chan is our fence (Vietnam), if there is a delay in granting, we cannot sit and watch, but the military affairs cannot be alarmed" (National History of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p.140) ^[11]. But when the Chenla situation stabilized, the Nguyen Dynasty withdrew its soldiers. In March 1811, Gia Long issued an edict to the King of Chenla: "Now the country of Phien (Chenla) is quiet, there is no need to leave troops behind, if there is a need to dispatch troops, it is not too late" (National History of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p.813) ^[11]. This demonstrated Vietnam's willingness to try not to interfere deeply in Chenla's internal affairs.

Second, the Siam Army always cherishes the ambition to conquer and re-establish protection over Chenla. Furthermore, within Chenla's ruling circle, the forces

opposing King Ang Chan, Ang Snguon, Ang Em, Ang Duong always sought to rely on Siam's forces to rebel, it is caused the situation in Chenla always unstable. This is an opportunity for Siam to enter Chenla. Therefore, the Nguyen Dynasty must have a good army on duty to help Ang Chan II stabilize the country's situation and guard against the Siamese army, push the war far away from the country. If Siam has captured Chenla, Vietnam's Southwest border will be seriously threatened. Hence, Vietnam wants to protect itself, it must protect Chenla's safety.

Thus, Gia Long has showed that establishing a protectorate over Chenla is a strategy for building a peaceful space in this kingdom and push war away from Vietnam's borders, not to rule and enslave Chenla. The Nguyen Dynasty affirmed: "Chenla belongs to our country (Vietnam), forever dedicated to it. Now because that country is weak, the court has sent officials to protect it, which is truly a noble gesture. But the purpose of the protectorate is to keep that country alive, not to rule that country" (National History Office of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p.883). The relationship between Vietnam and Chenla is an important part of the Nguyen army's struggle against invaders to protect the Fatherland and the Vietnamese people.

Conclusion

In the early 19th century, the geopolitical landscape of Southeast Asia centered around the complex triangular relationship between Vietnam, Chenla (Cambodia), and Siam (Thailand). Vietnam, under the Nguyen Dynasty, strategically engaged with both neighboring powers, using Chenla as a buffer state to safeguard its southwestern borders. This relationship was characterized by Vietnam's military presence in Chenla, aimed at protecting it from Siamese encroachment and internal instability. Despite occasional conflicts, Vietnam maintained a policy of non-interference in Chenla's internal affairs, emphasizing protection rather than control. This diplomatic and military strategy underscored Vietnam's efforts to secure its national interests while promoting regional stability.

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