

BRITISH POLICY TOWARDS SIAM, CAMBODIA, AND
VIETNAM, 1842-1858 *

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BRITISH POLICY AND THE REACTION TO BRITISH POLICY were significant factors in creating the political structure of nineteenth-century South-east Asia. Largely, they determined the position in that structure of Siam, of Vietnam, and of the intervening vassal remnant of Cambodia. Siam was more important in British policy than Vietnam, more important to British interests. But more fundamental in deciding the future of the two countries (on which the future of Cambodia also depended), was their reaction to British policy. Both sought to insure their political independence in the changing world of Southeast Asia. Their ruling groups chose differing means and thus enjoyed differing success.

At the time of the Crawford mission to Siam and Vietnam in 1822, the attitudes of the two governments did not seem very different. Both were jealous of the conquering English Company, and both sought to deflect its approaches—by treating in the tributary style of East Asian diplomacy and by implying that they could really deal only with the King of Great Britain—rather than meet the British more on British terms. Crawford's conclusions were somewhat similar in both cases: commerce with both countries should be carried on indirectly through Chinese junks. But he did recognize certain differences. The commercial importance of Vietnam, he thought, had been exaggerated; its political importance to the Indian Government was less. Siam, on the other hand, was (whether the Company ruled in India or not) "within the pale of our Indian diplomacy,"¹ in view of British interests in the tributary states of northern Malaya and the British occupation of the Tenasserim provinces in the first Burma war. Not that this meant that there should be an envoy at Bangkok: such might only be a source of irritation. "The sea on one quarter, and impracticable mountains and forests on another, are barriers which, together with the fears and discretion of the Siamese Government, will in all likelihood preserve us long at peace with this people..."²

On the other hand, Crawford thought that the Royal Navy might be a vehicle for communication with Vietnam on the part of the British Government. A direct intercourse with the Crown would flatter the court at Hue and perhaps improve commercial relations.³

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¹ John Crawford, *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China*, Second ed., (London, 1830), i, 472.

² *Ibid.*, i, 472.

³ *Ibid.*, i, 474-5.

Whether a diplomatic approach on the part of the royal government would (at the time of Crawford's mission) have produced a different reaction in either country is, perhaps, doubtful. In fact, for two decades, it was not attempted in either country, even the way Crawford suggested as a means of cutting into the Company's diplomatic monopoly. By the time it was attempted, Vietnam's reaction had, perhaps, been affected by unfortunate dealings with other western powers. On the other hand, Siam pursued (despite one major crisis) a different policy, setting out from a treaty made with the Company's envoy—Captain Henry Burney—in 1826. Siam had indeed been brought into closer touch with the British by common boundaries and by a busier trade, and had been impressed by the defeat of the neighboring Burmese.⁴ But the most important factor in the differing reaction of Siam and Vietnam was their different history, and the different roles earlier Europeans had assumed in it. Siam had played off the predominant European power in past centuries by calling in countervailing powers. Vietnam had seen different European powers involved in her Civil War. Indeed, Minh-Mang's growing repression of Catholic missionary activities in the 1820's and 1830's was of political origin. The missionary Pigneau had aided Cia-Long, who had re-established an independent Vietnam: might not his dynasty and Vietnam's independence be challenged in a similar way? This consideration seems to qualify Crawford's optimism about royal missions—though it is inconclusive, since for years none were sent—and to be perhaps the major factor in the treatment of them when they were sent.

The Supreme Government in Calcutta had been doubtful about dispatching the Burney mission to Siam. It observed that

All extension of our territorial possessions and political relations on the side of the Indo-Chinese nations is, with reference to the peculiar character of those states, to their decided jealousy of our power and ambition, and to their proximity to China, earnestly to be deprecated and declined as far as the course of events and the force of circumstances will permit. . . . Even the negotiation of treaties and positive engagements with the Siamese Government. . . . may be regarded as open to serious objection lest any future violation of their conditions should impose upon us the necessity of resenting such breaches of contract. . . .⁵

Nevertheless, the mission had been sent, since in practice Siam was already involved in "political relations" with the British. Moreover, a treaty was signed, providing that British merchants might "buy and sell without the intervention of other persons," that rice exports and opium imports should be prohibited, and that a measurement duty of 1700 ticals per Siamese fathom should be levied. The treaty also partially conceded Siamese claims over the northern Malay states, especially Kedah.

The attempts of the Penang Government to rectify what it regarded as an unsatisfactory conclusion, led the Governor-General to reiterate that the proper policy towards the Siamese was "to endeavour to allay their jealousy of our ultimate views. . . and to derive from our connection with them every

⁴ W. F. Vella, *Siam Under Rama III 1824-1851* (Locust Valley, 1957), 118, 121.

⁵ G.-G.-in-Co. to Gov.-in-Co., 19th November 1824. *Straits Settlements Factory Records 99* (4th January 1825), India Office Library.

attainable degree of commercial advantage, by practising in our intercourse with them the utmost forbearance, temper, and moderation both in language and action . . . and . . . by faithfully and scrupulously observing the conditions of the treaty which fixes our future relations. . . ."⁶ The Company was anxious to retain its existing relations with China and its position in the Canton market and unwilling, therefore, to press upon Peking's Indo-Chinese "feudatories."

East Asian diplomacy was, along with direct British commerce with East Asia, still in the hands of the Company. If this fact obstructed diplomatic relations between Britain and the Indo-Chinese countries (and this is, it has been suggested, doubtful), that fact also meant that British policy in the area was restrained and cautious. Vietnam was left alone, left to become involved with the missionaries and their supporters, to become more isolationist than ever. Siam was handled in a restrained way that, no doubt, facilitated the adjustment in Thai policy marked by the treaty of 1826.

In 1834, the Company's monopoly of the China trade was brought to an end, and the British Government appointed a Superintendent of Trade there. Further changes followed, with the deterioration in Anglo-Chinese relations, the first Opium War, the annexation of Hong Kong, and the opening of Chinese ports under the treaty of Nanking. In the minds of some, this seemed to clear the way for a new policy towards the Indo-Chinese vassals. The inhibition of the Company's Chinese policy was removed; the vassals might follow their suzerain's example and admit commerce more freely; and the British Government would benefit by conducting direct relations with them. Among those who argued in this way, were Charles Gutzlaff, Chinese Secretary at Hong Kong, and Montgomery Martin, one-time Colonial Treasurer.

In Siam, some commercial development had ensued upon the treaty of 1826. Junks from Siam came to provide one of Singapore's more valuable trades and in addition, trade was built up at Bangkok by Europeans, especially by the Scot Robert Hunter, who had four vessels annually making voyages by the mid-1830's.⁷ The duties were so heavy on square-rigged vessels, however, that most of the produce went to Singapore on Chinese and Siamese junks.⁸ Furthermore, in the late 1830's and 1840's, the Siamese government extended the monopolistic system of tax-farming—for instance, in 1839 in the case of sugar—⁹ while leading Siamese began trading in their own square-rigged vessels.¹⁰

More particularly, Hunter became involved in a quarrel with the Siamese government which, at the time of the British expedition to China, had ordered a steamer from him. When, after the expedition had safely returned to India, the government refused to buy it, Hunter sold it to Siam's enemy,

⁶ G.-G.-to ov.-in-Co., 23rd July 1827. *S.S.F.R.* 142 (6th September 1827).

⁷ R. Adey Moore, "An Early British Merchant in Bangkok," *The Journal of the Siam Society*, XI, Pt. 2 (1914-5), 25.

⁸ G.W. Earl, *The Eastern Seas* (London, 1837), 177.

⁹ Neon Snidvongs, *The Development of Siamese Relations with Britain and France in the Reign of Maha Mongkut, 1851-1868* (unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of London, 1961), 136.

¹⁰ Vella, *op. cit.*, 128.

the Vietnamese.¹¹ As a result of the quarrel, Hunter promoted protests to the Indian Government about alleged infractions of the Burney treaty—for instance, a memorial of May 1843 protesting at the sugar monopoly—at a prohibition on teak exports, and at the excessive punishments inflicted for importing opium.¹²

The Indian Government declared that the monopoly did not violate the treaty: no interference was at present required.¹³ A further memorial from Hunter urged action to secure some redress over the sugar monopoly and over the breach of the agreement to purchase his steamer, and to conclude a new arrangement with the Siamese replacing the heavy measurement duties: “the successes of Great Britain in China are fresh in their memory”¹⁴ Governor Butterworth in the Straits Settlements thought that most of Hunter’s complaints lacked substance, but that the Burney treaty should be revised.¹⁵ The Court of Directors thought the British right of remonstrance against the sugar monopoly not clear enough to justify action.¹⁶

The Company was still cautious, still concerned about the risks of collision and war. If Siam was not now to be considered in relation to China, it could still be considered in relation to Burma and to India in general: it was still within the pale of Indian diplomacy. General political considerations operated against any disposition to rush to the defense of the commercial interests of the Bangkok merchants or the Straits Settlements. There was a treaty with Siam: it was best to avoid risking the bases of relations it settled even if the Siamese were said to be infringing particular clauses.

The Vietnamese Government had made liberal commercial promises to Crawford, but trade with Vietnam was in fact (as he had prophesied) to center largely on Singapore, involving junks and topes and also royal Vietnamese vessels. The Vietnamese Government indeed sought a monopoly by denying Cochin-Chinese sailors the right to carry arms, and so discouraging their enterprise by committing them to the Malay and Chinese pirates.¹⁷ The attempted monopoly was much more a function than a cause of the Vietnamese policy of limited communication, and this Gutzlaff failed to realize.

In his memorandum of July 1845,¹⁸ he pointed out that—despite their promises to Crawford—the Hue Government had, in fact, frustrated a direct intercourse with Vietnam. But he explained this by referring to “the cupidity of the Government to monopolize as much as possible all valuable articles and export them in its own bottoms” He thought the Emperor might be persuaded to turn to free intercourse and to impose moderate duties

¹¹ Snidvongs, *op cit.*, 141. Moore, J.S.S., XI, Pt. 2, 33.

¹² *The Burney Papers* (Bangkok, 1910-14), IV, Pt. 2, 81-3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 129-35.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 160-6.

¹⁶ Court to G.-G., 2nd January 1846. *F.O.17/150*, Public Record Office.

¹⁷ Earl, *op. cit.*, 198.

¹⁸ “Remarks upon the establishment of a Commercial Treaty with Siam, Annam (or Cochin China), Korea and Japan,” 12th July 1845. *F.O.17/100*. Gutzlaff had been a missionary in W.F. Vella, *Origins of ‘Survival Diplomacy’ in Siam: Relations between Siam and the West, 1822-56* (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of California, 1950), 40.

as a means of raising revenue. He was optimistic over the effect of appointing "an accredited Envoy from Her Majesty."

Such an envoy to Siam, Gutzlaff thought, might secure a revision of the commercial parts of the Burney treaty and put an end to monopolies. The political topics and territorial disputes he would consider "as foreign to his mission, and entirely unconnected with the affairs of the Home Government..... ." A consular agent might be appointed, and on his accession he could advise the heir presumptive, "a devoted friend to foreigners..... ."

Sir John Davis, the Superintendent in China, supported Gutzlaff's plan. The Foreign Office, despite Gutzlaff's attempt to divide off "the affairs of the Home Government" from those of India, referred it to the India Board.¹⁹ The President thought the Burney treaty "sufficient for the objects of Trade and Friendship; and, at any rate, I should be inclined to doubt the policy of risking the advantages possessed under the present treaty, in the attempt to obtain greater advantages under a new engagement." With Vietnam, however, there was no treaty, there was no such risk, and a negotiation might be attempted; if successful there, the scheme might be extended to Siam. A provision should be included against internal monopolies.²⁰

The Indian authorities were prepared for experiment beyond the pale of their diplomacy, in Vietnam. Here, British interests were sufficiently unimportant to allow a new approach. In the case of Siam, British interests were more important, and a new approach—originating in a dubious breach of the treaty—might only risk the existing relationship. Again, therefore, it was not a lack of British endeavor, deriving from a lack of interest, that promoted Vietnam's isolation. Indeed, in this case, the very lack of interest promoted a new endeavor, while the weight of British interest in Siam contributed to the caution among the Indian authorities whose advice the Foreign Office followed. A full power — though no royal letter from the Queen — was sent to Davis for negotiation with Vietnam.²¹

The India Board also opposed the Board of Trade's proposition to appoint a consular agent in Bangkok for the purpose of certifying that Siamese sugar was not slave-grown and could thus qualify for importation into Britain at new lower rates of duty. A City merchant (Parker Hammond) approached the Foreign Office and proposed the appointment of a Bangkok merchant (Daniel Brown) as consul, and the negotiation of a new treaty with Siam. The proposal was repeated later in 1846 and in 1847, but Hammond was told that the Government "had no occasion to avail themselves of his suggestion."²²

Possibly, the interested merchants brought the matter before Sir James Brooke during his visit to England in October 1847-February 1848.²³ Brooke was at a peak in his career: the Foreign Office had appointed him

¹⁹ Davis to Aberdeen, 1st August 1845. *F.O.17/107*. F.O. to India Board, 24th. November 845. *F.O.17/107*.

²⁰ Ripon to Aberdeen, 11th March, 1846. F.O. 17/117.

²¹ Aberdeen to Davis, 18th March 1846. F.O. 17/108.

²² Memo., 19th August 1848. *F.O.17/150*.

²³ The dates are from Sir S. Runciman, *The White Rajahs* (Cambridge, 1960), 88, 91.

Commissioner and Consul-General to the Sultan and Independent Chiefs in Borneo; he had concluded a treaty with Brunei and became Governor of the new colony of Labuan.

In August 1848, Hammond and Co. again alluded to the sugar monopoly in Bangkok and other alleged infractions of the Burney treaty, and suggested that, in view of the China war, a British remonstrance would be heeded by the Siamese court. The Governor of Labuan, it was said, would willingly endeavor to remedy the decline of trade and a new treaty might be made.²⁴ The India Board, duly consulted, still adhered to its views of 1846.²⁵ Attempts to by-pass the Indian authorities in seeking action at Bangkok were thus still unsuccessful.

Meanwhile, in Singapore, the Chamber of Commerce had taken the matter up. It tried the Governor-General first, complaining of monopolies as infringing the Burney treaty and of the measurement duties specified in the treaty as hindering competition with native craft, and protesting at arbitrary acts against British subjects. A new treaty should be made, establishing equitable duties, securing unrestricted trading, ending the prohibition on rice exports, and appointing a consul.²⁶

Despairing of the Indian authorities, the merchants turned to the Royal Navy. In May, they called the Senior Naval Officer's attention to arbitrary proceedings against the firm of Silver, Brown and Co., whose exports to Singapore had allegedly been prohibited. They suggested his proceeding to Bangkok "to give protection to British Trade and persons, in any emergency which the unsettled state of affairs there may render necessary, and further to require that such arbitrary proceedings as above alluded to be put a stop to and guarded against hereafter." Perhaps, he might be able to put relations with Siam on a better footing, or take security for the faithful execution of the existing treaty. Commander Plumbridge took no action, so the Chamber turned to the Commander-in-Chief. Sir Francis Collier replied, in turn, that he must refer to the Admiralty. The Admiralty referred to the Foreign Office, the Foreign Office to the India Board, with predictable results.²⁷

Meanwhile, in October, the Singapore Chamber followed up with a direct approach to the Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston. Its memorial urged the conclusion of a new treaty with Siam. It also wanted the conclusion of a treaty with Vietnam, to be negotiated by an envoy or commissioner in conjunction with the Commander-in-Chief.²⁸

Davis' mission to Vietnam had, in fact, proved a failure. He had been unduly optimistic; his judgments had been mistaken. The most difficult part, he had argued, would be the abolition of the trade monopoly. One problem—"the absence of the Sovereign character in the Governor General"—had, however, been overcome. Furthermore, the French clash with

²⁴ Statement by Hammond and Co., 11th August 1848. *F.O.17/150*.

²⁵ India Board to F.O., 23rd August 1848, and enclosures. *F.O.17/150*.

²⁶ Chamber of Commerce to G.-G., 28th January 1848. *F.O.17/151*.

²⁷ Ker to Plumbridge, 17th April 1848; Ker to Collier, 21st August 1848 reply, s.d.; F.O. to India Board, 6th November 1848; reply, 13th November, 1848 *F.O.17/151*.

²⁸ Memorial, October 1848. *F.O.17/162*.

the Vietnamese at Tourane, early in 1847, might lead them by contrast to receive well the pacific British.²⁹ But, in fact, the clash — deriving, like an American clash two years previously, from the missionary issue — had redoubled the exclusionist policy towards all Europeans. The new Emperor Tu-Duc brought an end to the royal trade to the southward.³⁰ Certainly this did not increase the likelihood of a friendly reception, even to an envoy of the British Crown. Davis, in the event, got no further than Tourane and was not allowed to proceed to the capital. Nor were the presents exchanged.³¹ What the India Board had seen as an experiment guiding the future course in Siam, proved a failure. Vietnam was thus included in Singapore's direct representations to the home government.

Acting in his retirement as agent for the Singapore merchants, Crawford brought their memorial before the Foreign Office. He felt, however, that "a formal, and consequently expensive Embassy to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China is not desirable, and that the most eligible course will consist in sending a couple of Steamers of light draught, under the case of an experienced, and discreet naval officer, being the bearer of a letter from her Majesty to the Sovereigns of the two countries, with one from the Secretary of State to their Ministers, but without any powers to negotiate."³² This recommendation was perhaps, somewhat on the lines of his Vietnam recommendation of the 1820's, except that he had then considered Siam to be exclusively an Indian matter. Furthermore, Crawford favored a rather different approach to Siam in another recommendation of March 1849. The mission to Bangkok should be conducted by a naval officer, with two small war steamers. Their appearance would have a "wholesome" effect, especially as the Siamese knew of "our exemplary chastisement of the Chinese..... ." In Vietnam, on the other hand, the envoy should simply deliver a friendly letter "requesting a continuance and extension of the commercial intercourse between the two nations. . . ." One steamer would be best; "and here, not forgetting the untoward circumstances which attended the recent visit of a French Admiral, the less military display the better . . ."³³

Again, Palmerston referred to the India Board. The President admitted that a more liberal system in Siam and Vietnam would benefit British commerce. The attempt to secure it, however, would (he apprehended) "produce only embarrassment and loss. If, however, the mercantile community, and Her Majesty's Government, at their own cost, and after due deliberation are inclined to run the risk, I should not deem it my duty to press further upon Your Lordship the doubts to which I have referred." Not that Crawford's paper removed those doubts. In the case of Vietnam, even according to his analysis, a mission was either needless, or it would be "fruitless." As for Siam, Crawford's plan was not to negotiate a treaty, but simply "to show that the capital of Siam, with its palaces and temples, might be laid in ashes in a few hours, and to satisfy the Court that an illiberal commercial

²⁹ Davis to Palmerston, 4th October 1847. *F.O.17/130*.

³⁰ Note enclosed in Parkes to Hammond, 3rd August 1855. *F.O.N7/236*.

³¹ Davis to Palmerston, 26th, 30th October 1847. *F.O.17/130*.

³² Crawford to Eddisbury, 26th December 1848. *F.O.17/151*.

³³ Notes in Crawford to Eddisbury, 1st March 1849. *F.O.17/161*.

policy cannot be preserved in with impunity...³⁴ The India Board thus grudgingly assented to a mission. But the Davis "experiment" had been a failure, and really the Board's objections now extended to Vietnam also.

The Foreign Office turned to the Board of Trade. The outcome was influenced by the activities of Montgomery Martin. In 1845, he had put in proposals similar to Gutzlaff's and, early in 1849, he had suggested a mission to Japan, Siam, Korea and Vietnam, emanating from the Queen's government, unconnected with Hong Kong, which (he argued) was "still viewed in the Countries adjacent to China as connected with the East India Company and their Indian Territories," since all the Governors, so far, had been Company servants. Subsequently, he promoted his plans in the manufacturing districts.

In August 1849, the Singapore Chamber sent a memorial to Palmerston, suggesting the appointment as negotiator in Siam and Vietnam of Brooke, who had lately concluded a treaty with Sulu.³⁵ This was, in turn, communicated to the India Board and the Board of Trade. The India Board referred to its earlier views. The Board of Trade declared that "the manufacturing districts in the North of England" were in favor of "an attempt to extend our commercial relations with Siam and Cochin China... ." Palmerston resolved to send Brooke on the mission.³⁶

Diplomatic dealings with the "Indo-Chinese nations" had, during the 1840's, been considered in relation to China with which a revolution in relations had occurred. Official proposals had emanated from Hong Kong and instructions had been sent to the Superintendent. At the same time, however, the merchants in the Straits Settlements—still under Company rule—had been urging a more active policy in the Archipelago. They sought direct contacts with the home government and the appointment (under the Foreign Office) of a Superintendent of Trade similar to the one in China.

The home government had not gone as far as this. It, however, displayed an interest in Borneo, Sulu and the adjacent islands, and was disposed to use Brooke as some kind of Superintendent or Commissioner of Trade without actually giving him the title and thus, perhaps, worsening relations with the Dutch.³⁷ Merchants in Bangkok and Singapore and their connections in London had seen the possibility of employing the apparently successful Brooke in the Indo-Chinese countries. There, nothing had yet been effected, and, though probably not because of Martin's argument, the Foreign Office favored the arrangement.

The new Southeast Asian orientation of Indo-Chinese diplomacy did not, however, mean that Southeast Asian matters were fully considered in Brooke's instructions. They were concerned with negotiating commercial stipulations

³⁴ Memo in Labouchers to Palmerston, 10th January 1849. *F.O.17/161*.

³⁵ Memorial, 20th August 1849. *F.O.17/162*.

³⁶ Hobhouse to Palmerston, 10th November 1849; Board of Trade to F.O., 22nd November 1849. *F.O.17/163*.

³⁷ See the present author's paper, "The Superintendence of British Interests in South-east Asia in the Nineteenth Century," read at the Conference of Asian Historians, Hong Kong, 1964, and to be published in the *Journal Southeast Asian History* in 1966.

that might be compared to those with other "imperfectly civilized States," such as China and Turkey.³⁸ Nothing was said about the territorial relations with Burma and with the Malay states that had once made Crawford consider Siam purely an Indian concern. The India Board, grudgingly assenting to a mission, had grudging observations about its conduct.

The Foreign Office did not send out royal letters for Brooke to deliver. However, so far as Siam went, he thought this might aid him "in maintaining the high and firm position which is necessary to take with Indo-Chinese Nations. . . ."³⁹ In fact, he did not intend to attempt the negotiation of a detailed treaty, merely to pave "the way for a more frequent and friendly communication. . . ."⁴⁰ The old king must shortly die and a new order would ensue with the accession of the heir presumptive, Mongkut.⁴¹ The *Sphinx*—the larger of the two steamers accompanying the mission—stuck on the bar of the Menam on its arrival from Singapore in August. Brooke's secretary, Spenser St. John, was to attribute to this the failure of the mission.⁴² But Rama III was set against any invasion of Siamese customs and traditions: he tried to turn to account not only Brooke's lack of a royal letter, but also the fact that he came on the part of the royal government, while there was already a treaty with the Company.⁴³ Brooke agreed to put his proposals into writing. These were then summarily rejected.⁴⁴

Brooke declared that the mission had been slighted and recommended that "amicable communications with the Siamese Government should cease till their feeling of hostility shall have been corrected. . . ."⁴⁵ The Burney treaty had been infringed and British subjects had been outraged. Decisive measures were called for: reparations and a new treaty should be demanded; and, if refused, "a force should be present immediately to enforce them by a rapid destruction of the defenses of the river, which would place us in possession of the Capital and by restoring us to our proper position of command, retrieve the past and ensure peace for the future, with all its advantages of a growing and most important commerce. . . ."⁴⁶ Mongkut would be placed on the throne. "At the same time the Malayan States (particularly Kedah) may be placed on a footing to save them from the oppressions they are now subjected to. . . ."⁴⁷

As for Vietnam, Brooke had, on receiving the instructions, written to suggest that a royal letter and presents should be sent out for him to deliver

³⁸ Palmerston to Brooke, 18th December 1849. *F.O.69/1*.

³⁹ Brooke to Palmerston, 5th March 1850. *F.O.69/1*.

⁴⁰ Brooke to Palmerston, 2nd July 1850. *F.O.69/1*.

⁴¹ Brooke to Stuart, 17th June 1850. John S. Templer, ed., *The Private Letters of Sir James Brooke* (London, 1853), ii, 304.

⁴² S. St. John, *The Life of Sir James Brooke* (Edinburgh and London, 1879), 222.

⁴³ Vella, *Siam under Rama III*, 135-6.

⁴⁴ N. Tarling, "Siam and Sir James Brooke," *The Journal of the Siam Society*, XLVIII, Pt. 2 (November 1960), 52, 54-5.

⁴⁵ Brooke's Journal. *F.O.69/1*.

⁴⁶ Brooke to Palmerston, 5th October 1850. *F.O.69/1*.

⁴⁷ Brooke to Palmerston, 5th October 1850, confidential. *F.O.69/1*.

No presents were sent out by the Foreign Office, but a letter was forwarded.⁴⁸ In fact, Brooke did not attempt the mission. Instead, he declared that Cambodia was

the Keystone of our policy in these countries,—the King of that ancient Kingdom is ready to throw himself under the protection of any European nation, who will save him from his implacable enemies, the Siamese and Cochin Chinese. A Treaty with this monarch at the same time that we act against Siam might be made. His independence guaranteed. The remnants of his fine Kingdom preserved; and a profitable trade opened. The Cochin Chinese might then be properly approached by questioning their right to interrupt the ingress and egress of British trade into Cambodia. The example of Siam—our friendship with Cambodia. The determined attitude (not Treaty seeking) would soon open Cambodia to our commerce and induce the Cochin Chinese to waive their objections to intercourse. . .

The Vietnamese were interfering with the trade at Kampot, and this would be the basis of an approach to them.⁴⁹

The Singapore Chamber of Commerce had declared in June that trade with Siam, except by Siamese vessels, was “all but extinct,” and suggested “that no course of proceedings short of actual hostilities can now or hereafter place our relations with that country in a worse position than that in which they now are.” Brooke should be accompanied by an imposing force.⁵⁰ After Brooke’s failure, the Chamber was divided as to future policy.

One group of memorialists thought that “a more advantageous treaty than the one at present in force cannot be concluded with the existing Government, unless by means which they would be unwilling to see employed.” Singapore supplied Bangkok with British manufactures. This trade went on in the hands of Bangkok Chinese, “and while the present pernicious revenue system pursued by the Siamese Government continues, your Memorialists entertain strong doubts whether any attempt to force this trade into other hands and into other channels, would in any degree tend to improve or extend British commercial relations with Siam. . . .” The commercial difficulties were “not to be attributed to any petty attempt to interrupt British Commerce or evade the existing Treaty, but seem entirely connected with the internal administration of the Government, which no treaty, however, skillfully framed, could possibly remedy, nor anything else, short of a complete change in the policy of the Government regarding the mode of levying and collecting the revenues. . . .” The question should rest “until a change of Government and policy take place, when peaceful negotiations may be resumed with better hopes of success. . . .” A warlike demonstration might “convulse the whole Kingdom, put a stop for years to all trade, and perhaps ultimately render the establishment of British power in the Country indispensable. . . .”⁵¹ The *Singapore Free Press* thought the aim here was

⁴⁸ Brooke to Palmerston, 6th March 1850; F.O. to Brooke, 22nd June, 2nd July 1850. *F.O.69/1*.

⁴⁹ As footnote 47.

⁵⁰ Logan to Brooke, 14th June 1850. *F.O.69/1*.

⁵¹ Memorial by Boustead and Co., and others to Palmerston, 1850. *Singapore Free Press*, 17th January 1851.

to suggest the expediency of confining the trade with Siam to Singapore, and the discontinuance of the attempt to prosecute a direct trade with that country, recommending in effect that the provisions of the existing treaty should be suffered to fall into disuse, and all preceding violations of it, and injuries to British subjects, quietly winked at. This course, although it might tend to the temporary advantage of the Memorialists, does not appear to us to be that best suited for upholding the respect due to the British nation, or for assuring the ultimate advantage of British trade with Siam...⁵²

Other memorialists indeed rejected the view as inconsistent with the previous views of the Chamber. If direct intercourse ceased, Singapore might derive some partial and uncertain benefit. But, even if Singapore's interests were alone to be considered, "we entertain no doubt whatever that, if our intercourse" with Siam "is fairly and freely opened up, the geographical position and other advantages enjoyed by Singapore must, under any circumstances, secure for it a very considerable portion of the Siam Trade, and we have no apprehension that, from such a Trade, left to find its natural channel, Singapore must ever be largely benefited..."⁵³ Crawford noted these differing views and later saw the Foreign Secretary.⁵⁴

Palmerston did not, in fact, follow Brooke's recommendations.⁵⁵ No doubt, this was not because he was sympathetic to the notion that Siamese trade might be confined to Singapore (as Crawford had thought back in the 1820's). Such narrow Straits Settlements views were unlikely to be endorsed at home. Indeed, the views of the second group of memorialists were, on this point, ultimately to prove more realistic. Generally, there were these tensions in the Singapore position: to some extent, its prosperity depended on the undeveloped character of Southeast Asian trade; development, the opening of new ports and routes, might threaten its dominance; but it could still hope for a substantial share of an expanded trade.⁵⁶

More relevant, perhaps, to the nature of the decision in London — on which there seem to be no official memoranda to offer guidance — was the proposal of the first group of memorialists to await a change of government and policy, rather than to resort to warlike demonstration. This sort of view not only suited certain commercial interests involved in the indirect trade: it was consonant with the trend of British policy towards Siam as so far conducted by the Indian authorities and the India Board. It was important, Brooke had been told, "that if your efforts should not succeed, they should at least leave things as they are, and should not expose us to the alternative of submitting to fresh affront, or of undertaking an expensive operation to punish insult..."⁵⁷

⁵² *Singapore Free Press*, 24th January 1851.

⁵³ Hamilton, Gray and Co. and others to Palmerston, received 19th. December 1850. *F.O.69/2*.

⁵⁴ Crawford to Stanley, 21st December 1850. *F.O.69/2*. Crawford to Derby, 25th March 1852. *F.O.97/368*.

⁵⁵ Palmerston to Brooke, 6th February 1851. *F.O.69/3*.

⁵⁶ On the development of Singapore's trade, see Wong Lin Ken, "The Trade of Singapore, 1819-69," *Journal of the Malayan Branch Royal Asiatic Society*, XXXIII, Pt. 4 (December 1960), and Chiang Hai Ding, *A History of Straits Settlements Foreign Trade, 1870-1915* (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Australian National University, 1963).

⁵⁷ As footnote 38.

The India Board had opposed any negotiation that might risk relations with a marcher territory for a doubtful advantage. The Foreign Office had finally secured its grudging assent to the mission, but had inherited some of its unwillingness to engage in political adventure. Furthermore, it was widely held—as by Gutzlaff, so, as first, by Brooke—that the accession of a new king in Siam would bring a more liberal policy. Anglo-Thai relations would broaden down from the Burney precedent: their narrowing was only temporary, and was not a cause for violent interruption. In the case of Vietnam, there was nothing to resent, though Brooke had suggested an approach based on the interruption of trade at Kampot. There was also nothing to interrupt.

It is not clear what, if anything, he intended by so doing, but Palmerston did seek further information about Kampot. Crawford had pointed to its trade with Singapore in Chinese junks and small square-rigged vessels: it could become an entrepot for distributing British manufactures, and “at the same time check the exclusive commercial policy of the Siamese.”⁵⁸ Some information was later received from Governor Butterworth, who drew upon Catholic missionaries.

The King of Cambodia is now hemmed in between two rival and powerful Potentates, who would readily resent any supposed offense, with a view of seizing upon some coveted portion of his territory, which would in all probability have long since been divided between them, but for the advantage of having a neutral and powerless State, so well situated for settling their disputes, and making war upon each other without injury to their own immediate subjects. Doubtless the King of Cambodia would gladly and gratefully place himself under the protection of any European Power that would guarantee him protection against the Siamese and Cochin Chinese; but to make a treaty with him independent of the guarantee would tend only to increase his difficulties, without offering the smallest benefit to the contracting party. . . .

The trade at Kampot—one of the few remaining ports—could “never be considerable, in consequence of the main entrance to the country, the Mekong. . . , with all its feeders flowing into the Sea through the territory of Cochin China. . . .” The country, too, had been devastated by recent Siam-Vietnam wars. Thus, “without the aid of Great Britain, Kampot or any other port in Cambodia, can never become a commercial Emporium.”⁵⁹ The Governor quoted an article in the *Singapore Free Press*. The Cambodians, it suggested, sought to use intervals of peace in the Siam-Vietnam wars to develop intercourse with outside nations. The trade at Kampot which they sought to foster was imperilled by pirates (hence the use of vessels of European construction). “Here is a point where the wedge might be inserted, that would open the interior of the Indo-Chinese Peninsula to British Commerce, as the great River of the Cambodians traverses its entire length and even affords communication into the heart of Siam. . . .”

Another number of the *Press* (also published in August 1850) had pointed out the presence in Singapore of an employee of the King of Cam-

⁵⁸ Crawford to Stanley, 21st December 1850. *F.O.69/2*.

⁵⁹ Butterworth to Secretary, 20th May 1851. *F.O.17/185*. Cf his analysis to Vella's, *Siam under Rama III*, 107-8.

bodia during the preceding months. His real purpose, it was thought, was "to solicit the assistance of the authorities in suppressing piracy . . . and thus to render the intercourse with the Port more free and open. . . ." Surely, Britain would not so neglect her interests, the paper continued, "as to refuse the proffered friendship, especially as it will afford her a favorable opportunity of renewing that system which led to the establishment of the British name in the East, that of protecting the weak from the oppression of the powerful. . . ." ⁶⁰

Before this information had reached the Foreign Office, Palmerston had heard of a rumored Cambodian proposal for a political connection.⁶¹ Butterworth, in turn, reported on this. He declared that "no overtures have been made to me, either directly or indirectly, to test the feelings of the British Authorities, relative to a Treaty of friendship." Constantine Monteiro, a confidential agent of the King, had shown him (Butterworth) his instructions the previous year, but they were not of a political nature, "and finding that he had fallen into the hands of the Editors of the Local Journals, I did not even seek an interview with him. . . ." The King's request for protection against the Chinese pirates notwithstanding, he had communicated to the Commander-in-Chief, and the *Semiramis* had been sent up in November.⁶² In addition, it may be added, an unofficial gesture was made. The commercial firm of D'Almeida sent the *Pantaloon* to Kampot, with the Danish adventurer, L. V. Helms, as supercargo.⁶³

According to a Cambodian chronicle for 1849, three Europeans came to trade—"Evang, Williams, and Hillomes." Subsequently the King sent two envoys to Singapore with a letter to "Joachim" instructed to ask the French for an alliance to facilitate commerce.⁶⁴ This, it has been argued, is really a reference to the Monteiro mission of the following year, concerned with the English.⁶⁵ Indeed, if "Hillomes" is Helms, not only the date but the order of events is mistaken, though "Joachim" may be identifiable with one of the D'Almeidas.⁶⁶

On the other hand, it is not impossible that the Cambodians—supposedly seeking intercourse with European powers—sought contacts with the French, and this may be all that the alleged proposal of an alliance meant. Equally, nothing may have been said of alliance in communications with the English authorities. But the proposal to cooperate against the pirates had been accepted, and, while they certainly did exist in the Gulf of Siam, the presence

⁶⁰ *S.F.P.*, 23rd, 30th August 1850.

⁶¹ It was mentioned in an interview with Hammond. Hammond to Palmerston, 19th May 1851. *F.O.97/185*.

⁶² Butterworth to Secretary, 21st August 1851, and enclosures. *F.O.17/185*.

⁶³ L. V. Helms, *Pioneering in the Far East* (London, 1882), 95-108.

⁶⁴ A. R. de Villemereuil, ed., *Explorations et Missions de Doudart de Lagrée* (Paris, 1883), 355.

⁶⁵ C. Meyniard, *Le Second Empire en Indo-Chine (Siam-Cambodge-Annam): L'ouverture de Siam au commerce et la convention du Cambodge* (Paris, 1891), 360-1.

⁶⁶ Joaquin was the eldest son of the founder of the firm, José d'Almeida, who died in 1850. C. A. Gibson-Hill, "George Samuel Windsor Earl", *Journal of the Malayan Branch Royal Asiatic Society*, XXXII, Pt. 1 (May 1959), 109n.

of the *Semiramis* off Kampot could undoubtedly also be of political significance. The newspaper had indeed associated the two: protecting the weak traders from the powerful pirates, and protecting the weak Cambodians from their powerful neighbors, were connected operations.

Whatever the local officials may have hoped or tried to do, with their limited authority and indirect means,⁶⁷ it is clear that Monteiro's presence in Singapore before Brooke left on his mission must have influenced the recommendations he ultimately made in the hope that the home Government might break away from the traditions of Indian diplomacy in the area.⁶⁸ The recommendations were not followed, and nothing came of the Kampot inquiries. But Palmerston was prepared to send Brooke on a new mission to Siam when news arrived in mid-1851 of Rama III's death and Mongkut's accession. Mongkut, however, wanted the mission postponed till after the funeral.⁶⁹

In March 1852, Lord Malmesbury, the new Foreign Secretary, asked if Brooke were ready to leave for Bangkok.⁷⁰ Brooke said he wished to stay longer in England for the sake of his health; he also declared that reforms were in progress in Siam, and recommended that the mission should await their completion.⁷¹ The *Singapore Free Press* attributed some of the reforms—which included the establishment of an opium farm and a modification of the prohibition on exporting rice—to the contracts made by Brooke on his visit.⁷² A reduction of the measurement duties it attributed to the representations of Helms, who had visited Bangkok.⁷³

Crawford urged that these reforms were arguments against the negotiation of a new treaty. He had always opposed a treaty, he said. "I am quite satisfied that it will be a wiser policy to encourage the spontaneous development which is now in progress, than to shackle a barbarous power by express stipulations. . . ." Better than a mission would be a friendly correspondence between the Siamese ministers and the Governors of Singapore and Labuan. "Too busy an interference" might in fact risk the power of a liberal sovereign, for there was a powerful party opposed to reform. Crawford did not, perhaps, strengthen his case by declaring that this was the view of the Chinese merchants, who had "nearly the whole foreign trade and navigation . . . in their hands. . . ." ⁷⁴ But the India Board, again consulted by the Foreign Office, agreed with Crawford.⁷⁵

⁶⁷ In 1853 H. M. S. Bitteth was sent from Singapore to convoy the junks to Kampot. The Siamese government complained that its visit caused some alarm in villages round the Gulf. N. Tarling, *Piracy and Politics in the Malay World* (Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra; Singapore, 1963), 215, 219.

⁶⁸ The statement, made in Tarling, *J. S. S.*, XLVIII, Pt. 2, p. 61, that Monteiro was sent to Singapore when the King heard of the failure of the Brooke mission is clearly mistaken.

⁶⁹ Brooke to Palmerston, 24th August 1851; *F.O.* to Brooke, 29th August 1851; Memo by Brooke, 18th September 1851. *F.O.69/3*.

⁷⁰ Addington to Brooke, 23rd March 1852. *F.O.97/368*.

⁷¹ Brooke to Addington, 24th March 1852, two letters, *F.O.97/368*.

⁷² *S. F. P.*, 4th July 1851. Cf. Snidvongs, *op. cit.*, 184.

⁷³ *S. F. P.*, 29th August 1851.

⁷⁴ Crawford to Derby, 25th March 1852, *F.O.97/368*.

⁷⁵ Herries to Malmesbury, 28th May, 16th June 1852. *F.O.97/368*.

One reason for Brooke's staying in England had been that he wished to meet the attacks on his policy in Borneo and the Archipelago. The controversy made it difficult for the Foreign Office to do anything more over the mission to Siam.⁷⁶ Some plan was being prepared, whereby Brooke was to leave his Labuan post, but to have greater scope as Commissioner, and to go again to Siam. In November, he dropped the Governorship,⁷⁷ but before the rest of the operation had been completed, the Government again changed.

Early in February 1853, the question of the Siam mission was brought up. Lord John Russell, the new Foreign Secretary, thought Crawford's arguments against it probably conclusive.⁷⁸ Shortly after, he interviewed Brooke. Brooke urged that the "jealousy" of the Siamese government was "not excited by intercourse and... not allayed by non-intercourse..." It was "of a permanent character, arising out of the constant territorial aggrandisement of the East India Company..." In the first Burma war, a mission had been sent: why not during the second?⁷⁹ But the India Board remained opposed to a mission, and Brooke was left with his consular appointment. Shortly after, indeed, the Coalition Government assented to an inquiry into Brooke's proceedings in Borneo.⁸⁰

Brooke's position as "Commissioner" in the Archipelago at large had been informal. But the change of policy his removal implied, did not produce an outcry, since the pressures of the 1840's for a forward policy there had lessened. So far as the mainland was concerned, on the other hand, the commercial interests had not lost sight of the opportunities Gutzlaff and Martin had pointed out and, with the appointment of a new Superintendent of Trade at Hong Kong in 1854, the Foreign Office—reverting to its Davis policy—took the opportunity to give Sir John Bowring powers and instructions to negotiate when feasible with Siam, Vietnam and Japan.⁸¹ The instructions, like Brooke's, did not cover any of the territorial matters that might be expected to emerge in negotiations with Siam.

Unable to go to Japan with a respectable armament, Bowring attempted the easier assignment in Siam first.⁸² Aided by the diplomacy of his son (John) and of the Consul at Amoy (Harry Parkes), by the presence of the quaintly-christened sloop *Rattler*, by Siamese knowledge of Burma's fate,⁸³ and by the statesmanship of the new chief minister or Kralahom, Bowring rapidly secured the treaty of 18th April 1855.⁸⁴

⁷⁶ Memo by Addington, 4th February 1853. *F.O.97/368*.

⁷⁷ Tarling, *J. S. S.*, XLVIII, Pt. 2, 66.

⁷⁸ Minute, 5th February 1853. *F.O.97/368*.

⁷⁹ Brooke to Russell, 8th February 1853. *F.O.12/13*.

⁸⁰ Tarling, *J. S. S.*, XLVIII, Pt. 2, 70.

⁸¹ Clarendon to Bowring, 13th February 1854. *F.O.17/210*.

⁸² Bowring to Clarendon, 8th September 1854. *F.O.17/216*. W. B. Beasley, *Great Britain and the Opening of Japan 1834-1858* (London, 1951), 98-102.

⁸³ G. F. Bartle, "Sir John Bowring and the Chinese and Siamese Commercial Treaties," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, XLIV, No. 2 (March 1962), 305.

⁸⁴ For an account of the mission, see N. Tarling, "The mission of Sir John Bowring to Siam," *The Journal of the Siam Society*, L, Pt. 2 (December 1962), 91-118.

The treaty, as Bowring told his son (Edgar), brought Siam "into the bright fields of hope and peaceful commerce. . . ." ⁸⁵ It displaced the measurement duties and monopolies by a system of export and import duties, opened the rice trade, and provided for the appointment of a consul and for extra-territorial jurisdiction. ⁸⁶ But for Siam, the "bright fields of hope" were political as well as commercial. The Siamese had again come to terms with the predominant power in Asia and so, had given themselves a guarantee for the future. Of this, they were aware.

To some extent, the French and Americans were acting with the British in China, and there was a reference in the discussions to their sending missions to Siam also. The Kralahom said he was glad Bowring had arrived first, for the Siamese "had trusted that he would be the pioneer of the new relations to be opened between them and the West, as they could then count upon such arrangements being concluded as would both be satisfactory to Siam, and sufficient to meet the demands that might hereafter be made by other of the Western Powers. . . ." ⁸⁷

Parkes took the treaty home, and returned in 1856, charged with the delivery of letters and presents from Queen Victoria, and with securing the further definition of some of the clauses, in particular, those relating to consular jurisdiction and to the modification of the Burney treaty. ⁸⁸ Parkes was less enthusiastic about the Kralahom than Bowring had been and more inclined to work with Mongkut; in any case, there was—during 1856—a coolness between them, and the Kralahom was taking little part in public affairs. It was upon the First King, therefore, that Parkes relied in negotiating (despite some conservative opposition) the additional agreement of May 1856. This defined consular jurisdiction and met most of the other British requirements, including a demand to specify the taxation due from Siamese subjects and thus, under article 4 of the Bowring treaty, from the British residents also. The negotiations in fact set the legal and taxation systems of Siam much in the shape they retained till the end of the century, when the system of consular jurisdiction (more especially its application to Asian proteges of the European powers) became a spur to the Europeanization of the judicial administration and to codification, ⁸⁹ and when the Siamese, seeking expanded revenue resources, sought to acquire tariff autonomy. ⁹⁰

In the course of the negotiations, Parkes made much use of the royal letter. He was the first envoy to bring from England. ⁹¹ It helped him to move

⁸⁵ Bowring to E. Bowring, 13th April 1855. *English Mss. 1228/125*, John Rylands Library, Manchester.

⁸⁶ For the text, see J. Bowring, *The Kingdom and People of Siam* (London, 1857), ii, 214-26.

⁸⁷ Enclosure No. 15 in Bowring to Clarendon, 28th April 1855. *F.O.17/229*.

⁸⁸ On Parkes' mission, see an article by the present author, "Harry Parkes' Negotiations in Bangkok in 1856," to be published in *The Journal of the Siam Society* in 1965.

⁸⁹ See Detchard Vongkomolshet, *The Administrative, Judicial and Financial Reforms of King Chulalongkorn 1868-1910* (Unpublished M. A. thesis, Cornell University, 1958), 159ff.

⁹⁰ See J. C. Ingram, *Economic Change in Thailand since 1850* (Stanford, 1955), 177-8.

⁹¹ Bowring did not have a letter, despite H. G. Quaritch Wales, *Siamese State Ceremonies. Their history and function* (London, 1931), 180.

his steamer, the *Auckland*, up to Bangkok, and to open and improve his communication with Mongkut. The letter, Parkes said, "touched his heart and flattered his ambition."⁹² In fact, the King's ambition, and the object of the concessions he made, was to secure the recognition of Siam as an independent state on a parity with European nations. The letter marked the achievement of this, he believed. It was something both Bangkok and Hue had looked for in 1822. The object then had been to evade such concessions, to assume at least a parity without coming to terms. The policy of Siam had changed, and the major concessions of the 1850's built upon the change. In Vietnam, there had been no such change: on the contrary.

As might have been anticipated, some Indian points had come up in the discussions of 1855, and Bowring had referred them to the Governor-General. These included the definition of the Kra boundary with British Burma, and also the status of Kedah, a Malay state whose position was defined in some detail in article 13 of the Burney treaty, but which the Siamese thought could now be simply declared a tributary. Governor Blundell, Butterworth's successor in the Straits Settlements, thought articles 12 and 14 more important, as they provided in a measure for the independence of other Malay states, Perak, Selangor, Trengganu and Kelantan.⁹³ The matter was referred to England, where India House officials noted "the inconvenience if not hazard of officers of Her Majesty's Government entering into treaties with states and countries connected [with] tho' not absolutely subject to India, independently of the Government of India. . . ."⁹⁴ The issue did not come up in the Parkes discussions—as a result all the relevant Burney articles remained in force—and the Governor-General, to whom the Court referred it back, did nothing. But, in practice, the position was changed by the Bowring treaty.

Diplomacy could no longer be purely "Indian." The Governors in the Straits Settlements, like Blundell regarding them as more or less independent, had often dealt directly with the tributary states, even Kedah. With the appointment of a consul at Bangkok, this became more difficult, and after the reaction against Governor Cavenagh's bombardment of Trengganu in 1862, there was a disposition to recognize Thai claims there and in Kelantan, as well as in Kedah.⁹⁵ British intervention occurred in Perak and Selangor in 1874, and so, in territorial, as in commercial matters, a new stage was reached in the relationship of Siam and the West that endured till the turn of the century. But their claims in Cambodia—also mentioned by the Siamese in their 1855 Kedah proposal—were affected by the relations of Vietnam and the West.

Bowring had found the Siamese anxious that he should also go to Hue. It was a matter of maintaining Siam's prestige among its neighbors. Among these, Burma—truncated by the second war with Britain—was no longer

⁹² Parkes to Clarendon, 22nd May 1856. *F.O.69/5*.

⁹³ Tarling, *J. S. S.*, L, Pt. 2, 111-2.

⁹⁴ Note on Court to G.-G.-in-Co., India Political, 1st October 1856, No. 36. *Despatches to India and Bengal*, C, 329, India Office Library.

⁹⁵ N. Tarling, "British Policy in the Malay Peninsula and Archipelago, 1824-1871," *Journal of the Malayan Branch Royal Asiatic Society*, XXX, Pt. 3 (October 1957), 69-74, 80-3.

a great power. But Siam and Vietnam were rivals and joint suzerains of Laos and Cambodia.⁹⁶ Bowring did indeed plan to go to Vietnam. He decided, however, to announce his purpose first. The reception afforded the announcement would enable him to judge whether he should go alone, as to Bangkok, or await the French and U.S. envoys. They might prove an embarrassment, especially if the reception were favorable.⁹⁷

In September Bowring sent the *Rattler* to Tourane with Thomas Wade—the Acting Chinese Secretary—to carry his communication to the court of Hue.⁹⁸ But at Tourane, Wade was told that the letter could go to the capital only if, after inspection, it proved to contain nothing objectionable, and that Wade could not go under any circumstances. In the event, the letter was not delivered at all.⁹⁹ “It is obvious,” wrote Bowring, “that the policy of the Cochin Chinese will continue to be that of repudiating the advances of foreigners, so long as foreigners can be kept in positions too remote to cause any anxiety. . . .” He thought that a direct approach to Hue with some ships of war might secure a treaty.¹⁰⁰ These were not at once available, but he told Montigny, the French envoy, that he could inform Tu-Duc that he intended to come.¹⁰¹ Bowring had indeed said that the outcome of the Wade mission would decide the question of cooperation with other European powers.

The Superintendent had revived French interest in Siam by communicating his treaty, and he had also suggested, after the Wade mission, that Montigny’s credentials should extend to Vietnam.¹⁰² Montigny secured a treaty on the English lines in Bangkok. Then, departing from his instructions, he attempted a *coup* in Cambodia, where he sought to establish French protection, but came up against Siamese opposition.¹⁰³ Meanwhile, the *Catinat* had been sent to Tourane to announce the arrival of the envoy. Again, a French ship became involved in conflict with the Vietnamese.¹⁰⁴ By the time Montigny arrived in January 1857, the *Catinat* had left, and his negotiations made no progress. The failure of the envoy worsened the treatment of the missionaries and precipitated the intervention which Napoleon III had come to favor.¹⁰⁵

The new crisis in China had led to Bowring’s replacement there by the appointment of Lord Elgin as High Commissioner in April 1857.¹⁰⁶ Bowring told his son (Edgar) that he looked to Siam “*proudly* in my hours of gloom. . .

⁹⁶ Snidvongs, *op. cit.*, pp. 275-6.

⁹⁷ Bowring to Clarendon, 7th May 1855, two letters. *F.O.17/229*.

⁹⁸ Bowring to Clarendon, 6th September 1855. *F.O.17/233*.

⁹⁹ Wade to Bowring, 17th September 1855. *F.O.17/233*. A fuller account of the Wade mission, as also of the earlier mission of Sir John Davis, will appear in the present author’s “British Relations with Vietnam, 1822-1858,” to be published in the *Journal of the Malaysian Branch Royal Asiatic Society* in 1966.

¹⁰⁰ Bowring to Clarendon, 8th October 1855. *F.O.17/233*.

¹⁰¹ H. Cordier, “La politique coloniale de la France au début du second empire (Indo-Chine, 1852-1858),” *T’oung Pao*, Series 2, X (1909), 311.

¹⁰² J. F. Cady, *The Roots of French Imperialism in Eastern Asia* (Ithaca, 1954), 144-5. Clarendon to Cowley, 18th February 1856. *F.O.27/1109*.

¹⁰³ Cady, *op. cit.*, 149-52.

¹⁰⁴ H. Cordier, “La France et la Cochin Chine, 1852-1858: La Mission du *Catinat* à Tourane (1856),” *T’oung Pao*, Series 2, VII (1906), 497-505.

¹⁰⁵ Cady, *op. cit.*, 154-5, 178 ff.

¹⁰⁶ W. C. Costin, *Great Britain and China 1833-1860* (Oxford, 1937), 231.

Kampot is also becoming a very important place and I must try to get a Treaty with Cambodia—now that China is taken from me (I do not complain) I hope I shall do the rest of the work—Cambodia-Cochin China-Korea-Japan—we must open them all. . . .”¹⁰⁷ In fact, shortly after, Bowring heard that he was prohibited from leaving Hong Kong during Elgin’s tour.¹⁰⁸ So he saw the French expedition to Vietnam of 1858—which he had in some sense set in motion—from a distance and inactively. He thought the French, by setting themselves up in Cochin China, might embarrass themselves and the British and threaten Siam and Cambodia. But, on the whole, he laid most emphasis on the embarrassment they would cause themselves.

The fact was that Vietnam had established no commercial and political relationship with the predominant power in Asia which thus felt no great concern over its future. In part this was because Vietnam offered fewer commercial attractions than Siam and no similar territorial points of contact. But this had not prevented—indeed in one case it had stimulated—the dispatch of diplomatic missions, none of which had been welcomed by the Vietnamese. Their attitude to the mild British approaches was no doubt affected by the more violent activities of other Western powers; but their reaction to European contacts had long been different from Siam’s. The rejection of the Wade mission led Bowring to foster and associate himself with the French venture, and more or less eliminated the final chance of Vietnam’s establishing a prior relationship with Britain.

Established in Cochin China, the French were in 1863 to enter direct negotiations with Cambodia. Admiral La Grandiere felt free to move at the expense of the Siamese, as Anglo-Thai relations had been strained by the Trengganu bombardment. A Cambodian emissary—significantly echoing the statements of 1850—said how important it was for the French flag to fly in Cambodian waters, to destroy piracy and restore commerce. A treaty then signed at Udong in August gave Cambodia French protection.¹⁰⁹ The India Office, consulted by the Foreign Office, felt that, so long as French proceedings did not interfere with the independence of Siam, they could be regarded without anxiety.¹¹⁰ In 1867, Siam gave up her claims over Cambodia in return for the provinces of Battambang and Angkor. Another part of the pattern of relations between Siam and the West was set till the turn of the century.

¹⁰⁷ Bowring to E. Bowring, 6th June 1857. *English Mss. 1228/185*.

¹⁰⁸ G. F. Bartle, “Sir John Bowring and the Arrow War in China,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, XLIII, No. 2 (March 1961), 310.

¹⁰⁹ B. L. Evans, *The Attitudes and Policies of Great Britain and China towards French Expansion in Cochin China, Cambodia, Annam, and Tongking 1858-83* (Unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of London, 1961), 68-69.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.