

The Border Protection and Sea Defense in the South Viet Nam of the Nguyen Dynasty in the First Half of the 19th Century

Luu Van Quyet^{1*}; Vo Van Sen²; Nguyen Thi Anh Nguyet³; Vo Phuc Toan⁴

^{1*}University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

^{1*}luuvanquyet@hcmussh.edu.vn

²University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

²senvv@hcmussh.edu.vn

³University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

³nguyetxhmv@hcmussh.edu.vn

⁴University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

⁴vophuctoan@hcmussh.edu.vn

Abstract

From distant past to present day, the Southern region has been playing an important role in national defense and foreign affairs, with great potential to create a breakthrough for the socioeconomic development of Vietnam. However, due to historical conditions and geographical location, political instabilities were frequently seen in the Southern region under the rule of the Nguyen lords and the early Nguyen Dynasty (early 19th century), especially the instability of the relationship between three feudal countries: Dai Viet (Vietnam), Chenla (Cambodia) and Siam (Thailand) from the 17th century to the first half of the 19th century. In its Southern defense strategy to prevent Siamese invasions and maintain its position as the "protector" of Chenla as well as to develop the new land, the Nguyen Dynasty focused on building border defense formation on land and sea in the South, with the defense system on the border area of Chau Doc, Ha Tien and the Southwestern sea in the Gulf of Thailand as the focus. The Nguyen Dynasty's proper implementation of policies in the border and sea areas had brought great effects and contributed to the strong protection of Dai Viet's sovereignty over the Southern land.

Key-words: Nguyen Dynasty, Protection, Border, Sea, Southern Region.

1. Introduction

In 1802, the Nguyen Dynasty was established to rule a largely unified Vietnam from the North to the South. With favorable geographical location and abundant natural resources, the Southern land under the rule of Nguyen lords and the early Nguyen Dynasty frequently witnessed

political instabilities; one of the reasons of which was the relationship between three feudal countries: Dai Viet (Vietnam), Chenla (Cambodia) and Siam (Thailand).

Regarding Chenla, establishing the border between Dai Viet and Chenla was not difficult because for a long time, Chenla had been attached to the border policies of Nguyen Dynasty's emperors, with the support and consent of the Chenla royal court. In addition, Chenla also wanted to rely on the power of Dai Viet to resist Siamese invasion. With the active protection policies of the Nguyen Dynasty for Chenla, the relationship between the two countries is good, peaceful and stable. On the other hand, the relationship between the Nguyen Dynasty and Siam has ups and downs (Le Thi My Trinh, 2009). Under the reign of Emperor Gia Long (1802-1820), the two countries had a quite favorable relationship, because Nguyen Anh (later Emperor Gia Long) used to ask for help from the Siamese to overthrow the Tay Son Dynasty. For his part, Nguyen Anh also played a role in helping the Siamese king to fight Burma and Malaysia. That relationship was manifested through specific actions, such as giving precious items and sending ambassadors to visit each other. However, unlike Chenla, Siam at that time was a fairly strong feudal country in Southeast Asia (Doan Nguyet Linh, Nguyen Hoang Vinh, 2005). The relationship between Dai Viet and Siam was balanced, and neither country being dependent on the other. As a result, the Siamese royal court also contemplated the intention to expand its territory and become a great power in Southeast Asia.

On the south side, Siamese territorial expansion was difficult, since Chenla was receiving too great protection from Dai Viet. Siam thus could not be hasty and careless, because they still had to watch out for all the moves of the Nguyen Dynasty. Therefore, although being friendly on the outside, Siam always took advantage of all possible opportunities to cause troubles on the border and pull Chenla out of the control of Dai Viet (Hoang Thai, 1986). In addition, with its favorable location for maritime and commercial activities, as well as abundant resources, the Southern sea was always included in Siamese political and military calculations to take control of these waters from the Nguyen Dynasty, thereby widening its path of expansion. Seeing through the schemes of the Siamese, the Nguyen Dynasty was always proactive in all preparations to protect the land border, sea and islands in the South with consistent policies to strengthen national potentials and establish critical foundations for the development of the country.

2. Literature Review

Research works on the Southern region in general and activities of reclamation, economic development and protection of sovereignty over land and sea borders have so far received the

attention of many scholars in Vietnam and abroad. A number of works directly related to this study have been published, including those of Phan Huy Le (2017), Vu Minh Giang (2016, 2019); Nguyen Quang Ngoc (2011); Do Bang (2014); Huynh Lua (2000); Huynh Ngoc Dang (2014); Le Trung Dung (2006); Luu Van Loi (2014); Tran Thi Mai (2013); Nguyen The Trung (2013), Nguyen Thi Anh Nguyet (2017), Nguyen Dinh Dau (2014), Phan Khoang (1969), Hoang Thai (1986), Chau Dat Quang (2017), Li Tana (1999), Yu Insun (1978), Masuda Erika (2007), Choi Byung Wook (2010); Philippe Langlet (1995); A.B. Woodside (1988); Nola Cooke (1994), etc. However, these works only stop at presenting a general and one-dimensional perspective without going deeply into analyzing and explaining the policies applied by the Nguyen Dynasty in the protection of the land border and the sea, especially haven't satisfactorily explained the relationship between Dai Viet, Chenla and Siam, and its direct impact on the policies of the Nguyen Dynasty. This article supplements the findings of the above scholars by presenting a more comprehensive and insightful view of the above issues.

The sources used in this article can be divided into three categories: (1) documents compiled under the reign of the Nguyen Dynasty, including: *Dai Nam thuc luc (Veritable Records of the Great South)*, *Gia Dinh thanh thong chi (Observations of Gia Dinh)*, *Phu bien tap luc (Miscellaneous Chronicles of the Pacified Frontier)*, *Dai Nam chinh bien liet truyen (Principal biographies of the Great South)*, etc. These are important historical records about activities of the Nguyen Dynasty compiled by court officials during the 19th and 20th century, which contain many information that we are interested in and are the basic source of documents for this study; (2) personal research works of Vietnamese and foreign researchers associated with their experience and observations of the South; and (3) records, genealogies and wills of Southern locals.

3. Methodology

Through these sources and based on methods of historical research, logic and interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary research, the article supplements the findings of the previous scholars by presenting a more comprehensive and insightful view of the policies applied by the Nguyen Dynasty to protect land and sea borders in the South in the first half of the 19th century. On the basis of evaluating the results, the article presents its own comments on these issues.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. The Way of the Nguyen Dynasty to Protect the Border Area in the Southern Region

In 1802, after the establishment of the dynasty, the territory of Dai Viet (Vietnam) was unified from the Nam Quan Pass (Vietnam-China border) to the coast of the Gulf of Thailand (Cape Ca Mau), including the sea and islands there. In the South, although the Nguyen Dynasty had control over critical areas and the residential areas along the borders of Chau Doc and Ha Tien, as well as the islands in the Gulf of Thailand such as Phu Quoc, there was yet a clearly planned and consistent boundary between Dai Viet (Vietnam) and Chenla (Cambodia). It was not until the reign of Emperor Minh Mang (1820-1841) that the geographical division and residential organization along the border between Dai Viet and Chenla was fundamentally shaped. This process is the consequence of many factors, including the increase of conflicts between the Nguyen Dynasty and the Siamese regarding the Chenla issue (Vu Duc Liem, 2017). In the following decades, many conflicts between Siam and Dai Viet took place, which was one of the reasons why the Nguyen Dynasty started to construct large-scale military defense system along the borders of Chau Doc and Ha Tien as well as increase the number of soldiers stationed there. At the same time, the Nguyen Dynasty also implemented policies to encourage people to come to these lands for reclamation and economic development, and established hamlets, villages and plantations along canals, military strongholds and newly built transportation systems in the border area (Vu Duc Liem, 2017).

4.1.1. The Construction of Stations and Strongholds for Military Defense along the Border in Chau Doc and Ha Tien

Emperor Gia Long proved to be wise to see that: Chau Doc and Ha Tien are as equally important as the Northern citadel (NHBND, 2006, vol.1, p.946). Although Chau Doc is a hilly area which is favorable for livestock rearing, the gathering of people to set up hamlets here at that time was still difficult. The reason is that the road to Chau Doc is long and difficult, while in the south near Can Tho and Vinh Long, where it is more convenient to travel to, there are still many good lands that have yet been reclaimed. Therefore, to immigrants, it is quite adventurous to go as far as to Chau Doc border area. Meanwhile, Ha Tien, with its location close to the sea, is an easy entrance for the Siamese army to attack the mainland. In addition, the natural conditions in Ha Tien are also not favorable because the soil here contains a large amount of alum, thus making it difficult to cultivate and preventing immigrants from coming here. Besides, the Khmer people in this region has a very

close connection with their mother country, so chances are high that they may rebel. The situation of border security is often unstable, so Vietnamese immigrants rarely come to reclaim this land and establish their businesses.

Chau Doc and Ha Tien are identified as critical lands which are directly related to the prosperity of the country, thus in order to hold the border area and prevent attacks from neighboring countries, there is no better way than to rely on the strength of the people. The Nguyen Dynasty devoted its attention with special reclamation policies for border areas to encourage people to come here. However, only preferential policies are not enough; it is also crucial to strengthen border security to create a stable environment for people to safely work and settle down. Therefore, instead of following the traditional policy of "immigrants reclaim the land first, the state then follows", the state went ahead to create favorable political and social conditions to attract more and more immigrants to Chau Doc and Ha Tien to reclaim the land and live here. These two cities were selected not purely due to their location, but also for the interest of national defense and security.

In order to ensure stable security and create favorable conditions for immigrants to reclaim land in the border area, in 1815, Emperor Gia Long ordered Luu Phuoc Tuong - the defense command governor of Vinh Thanh Town to move his office in Chau Doc from Chau Giang to the west bank of Hau River (Chau Doc township today) and build Chau Doc fort. The governor of Vinh Thanh mobilized 3,000 militias in the town and gave each of them two *quan* (approx. 20 maces) of money and one *vuong* (approx. 30 kg) of rice for them to build the new Chau Doc fort. The fort has a long hexagonal shape of about 972 meters from the front to the back, and about 492 meters from the left to the right. After the construction of the fort was completed, soldiers were recruited from four towns; with 500 soldiers stationed at the fort (NHBND, 1972, vol.38, p. 250). The concentration of militias and the mobilization of soldiers helped to increase the mechanical population of the border area. In 1816, Chau Doc Fort was completed. Emperor Gia Long ordered the defense command governor of Gia Dinh to send 100 soldiers there. 500 soldiers guarding the fort were all skillful. As a rule, the soldiers are changed once every three months, while their commander is changed once every year. Gia Long also ordered for 40 cast iron cannons and ammunition to be placed at the fort to support the defense (NHBND, 1972, vol.38, p.250). This fort is considered a key military base for the defense of the Southwestern border, creating the control over Chenla (Duong The Hien, 2017, p. 90) and blocking the Siamese attacks.

In addition to Chau Doc Fort, the Nguyen Dynasty also built a lot of military defensive works in the border area, such as: An Giang citadel, a very important place built in Chau Doc, which was used as the garrison of An Ha Governor General; Chau Giang fortress at the lower of Vinh An Canal;

Vinh Hung base on the east bank of Hau River; Thuan Tan base on the beginning of Vam Nao River, near the intersection with Hau River in Dong Xuyen District; Cuong Thanh base in Dong Xuyen District; Dong Xuyen base on the west bank of Hau River; Tran Di base on the north bank of Ba Xuyen River in Vinh Dinh District; Cuong Thanh base in Dong Xuyen District; Cuong Oai base on the east bank of Hau River in Vinh An District; Tran Giang base on the west bank of Can Tho River in Phong Phu District, etc., and other works such as Binh Thien fortress, Da Phuc station, Chau Phu station and An Chau station. All created a center of defense and command for the entire national defense system of the Southwest, making critical contributions to preserving the independence and security of the country (Duong The Hien, 2017, pp. 90-91).

4.1.2. Sending People to the Border Area for Reclamation of Land and Creating Local Authority

At the end of 1802, Gia Long ordered the defense command governor of Ha Tien Town to call for drifters to go back to their hometown to work; the State will exempt taxes and compulsory labor for them to live with peace of mind. In 1803, Gia Long again ordered officials of towns to "gather the poor and the State will give rice for them to reclaim uncultivated land (NHBND, 2006, vol.3, p. 63). In 1817, the royal court saw that there were many vacant lands in the border area, so court officials were tasked with encouraging people to settle down there. A Chinese man called Diep Hoi, who was working as an official in Chenla, was assigned to be in charge of exploiting the land of Chau Doc under the command of the governor of Vinh Thanh Town. Diep Hoi gathered Vietnamese, Burmese and Chinese people, and provided them with capital from the public budget for them to practice tree cultivation, livestock rearing, pottery, etc. The State hardly binds these people with compulsory obligations. They can continue with whatever profession they are in. For those who lack the means for land reclamation, the State will provide them with loans so that they can rest assure to do their business (Nguyen Dinh Dau, 1994). These policies of Gia Long aim to both expand the cultivation area, develop the economy and stabilize people's lives, as well as to distribute in a relatively organized and reasonable way the population along the southern border.

In 1811, in order to restore the land of Ha Tien, Emperor Gia Long assigned Truong Phuc Giao- the chief of Kien Giang Province to be the defense command governor of Ha Tien, and Bui Duc Mien - the surveillance commissioner of Dinh Tuong to be the defense command lieutenant governor. The two officials "repair the army camps, gather drifters, build schools, reclaim uncultivated land, build marketplaces, and assign separate areas for Chinese, Chenla and Java people"

(NHBND, 2006, vol.1, p. 821). In 1818, realizing that the land in Chau Doc was still mainly vacant, Emperor Gia Long ordered the chief of Vinh Thanh Town to call for Duong (Chinese) people, Chenla people and Champa people to reside, set up marketplace and reclaim the land there. In order to create all conditions and protect the rights and interests of these people, Emperor Gia Long also strictly forbade Vietnamese immigrants from encroaching and causing troubles on the land reclaimed by these people (Nguyen Dinh Dau, 1994).

The reclamation of land, formation of administrative institutions and stabilization of life in the new land went stronger and more vibrant as the Nguyen Dynasty dug large canals like Thoai Ha and Vinh Te. As soon as the canals were being dug, the Nguyen emperors always encouraged the establishment of residential areas in Chau Doc with the aim of “first recruit traders and build hamlets and villages to increase the population and for the land to be further reclaimed” (NHBND, 2006, vol.2, p.123). In order to further protect the borderland, villages and hamlets were established from Chau Doc to That Son, along Vinh Te canal following rather easygoing regulations. People only needed to make an application then sent it to the Marquis of Thoai Ngoc - who at that time was the imperial commissioner in charge of affairs management, commander of Chau Doc Fort, protector of the royal seal of Cao Mien and chief of border defense of Ha Tien Town - to certify and stamp the red seal of the “*protector of the royal seal of Cao Mien*”. After being sealed, the document is considered a certificate to confirm that the establishment of the village or the hamlet is recognized (Le Van Nam, 2000, p. 54).

In 1943, Emperor Thieu Tri issued a decree to call for people to reclaim the vacant land in An Giang: “The land along the border is mostly vacant, if people can reside there to expand the fields and the canals, thus increase the population - that is also a good plan for the border (NHBND, 2006, vol.6, p. 494). The completion of Thoai Ha canal played a great role in “connecting to the waterways in Kien Giang”, “assisting the travel of ships”, and “making the travel of people more convenient” (Trinh Hoai Duc, 2006, p. 84) to help with the socioeconomic development of Thoai Son - An Giang region. Cambodian people can also take advantage of the divided terrain on the mountainside and the ravine to do fishing and hunting. With the characteristics of interlaced rivers and canals, taking advantage of natural conditions to dig canals and trenches is an effective way to protect the national borders. This was confirmed in the edicts and decrees issued by Nguyen emperors when ordering Nguyen Van Thoai to dig Vinh Te canal. The excavation of canal is truly “critical for the protection of the border” and “the benefits of many years later” (NHBND, 2006, vol.2, pp. 331-335). Since “travel on the water is smooth, national defense and trade can enjoy immense benefits” (NHBND, 2006, p. 207). The canal shortened the path from Chau Doc to Ha Tien and helped to supply food and

reinforcements in time when incidents relating to Chenla and Siam happen. With the canal, it became easier to travel and trade between regions in the west of Hau River. The huge amount of fresh water flowing through Vinh Te canal would help to “wash the sour and saline” and “sweeten” the land in the Long Xuyen Quadrangle. Those are the prerequisites to promote the migration to this unspoiled land. Therefore, Vinh Te canal played a great role in protecting border security, promoting trade and travel and developing agriculture economy.

In order to encourage the flow of immigrants to settle here, the royal court hardly cared about tax collection. In 1830, the governor of Gia Dinh Town proposed to the emperor: “Chau Doc is a new area where the land has not been fully reclaimed. Please postpone the collection of taxes” (NHBND, 2006, vol.3, p. 88). The emperor decided: “It is an important border area of the country. I want to preserve it for the people, so special attention must be paid to governing the land. That is the plan of border defense. As for the tax issue, it is not something that must be calculated in advance” (NHBND, 2006, vol.3, pp. 88-89) Later, Emperor Minh Mang granted a 3-year tax exemption. When the situation was essentially stabilized, the governor of Gia Dinh proposed to collect taxes. This time, the emperor said: “Newly established villages are exempted from tax for an additional 3 years. Poll tax and land tax are deferred for one more year” (NHBND, 2006, vol.3, pp. 88-89).

The fact that Siamese troops often invaded seriously affected the reclamation efforts of the army and people in border areas. Faced with that situation, in 1835, Emperor Minh Mang issued an edict for Ha Tien to promote the establishment of plantations and recruit people for land reclamation, “for them to plow the fields and practice their professions, and let them use the rice and crops they grow. One or two years later, as their lives become more stable, those rice and crops can be collected as tax” (NHBND, 2006, vol.4, p. 561). For the establishment of plantations, the emperor required the superintendent Tran Chan to select areas that can be cultivated, and provide water buffaloes and farming tools for the soldiers to work on the land. Tran Chan then chose the area of Binh An Hamlet, My Duc Commune (in Ha Chau District, near Chu Nham station) and mobilized soldiers from Ha Tien, who are familiar with the land and water, to come here. Among them, 50 soldiers would guard Chu Nham station, the remaining 100 went to the nearby Binh An plantation to work on the field. In 1852, wanting to develop the land of An Giang, Nguyen Tri Phuong - the borderlands patrol commissioner of the Southern region proposed “to keep criminals of petty thefts and thugs with unclear identity in 6 Southern provinces, whose sentences are less than 3 years in prison,... as soldiers at forts to work for land reclamation. They can keep the land they reclaimed as their property for generations” (NHBND, 2006, vol.7, pp. 235, 263). Nguyen Tri Phuong also asked to “mobilize workers of the plantations in two provinces along Vinh Te river and organize them into two teams,

each has 50 people, managed by the two provinces. Normally, they will work on the fields, but when it is required, they will stay on guard. Also along the banks of the river, people are encouraged to set up hamlets, and exempted from being selected for military service. In normal days, they can do business as they want; however, when incidents happen, they must gather and take care of the defense work” (NHBND, 2006, vol.2, p. 359).

With the positive policies implemented by the Nguyen Dynasty in the southern border in the first half of the 19th century, remarkable results had been achieved.

For the land of Ha Tien, in the first half of the 19th century, the situation of population and village expansion are reflected as follows: "the population gradually increases, the agricultural land is expanded day by day (NHBND, 2006, vol.2, p. 359). By 1824, “the population was 668 people, divided into 37 communes and villages with 348 plots of paddy field and garden. Among those 37 communes, villages and hamlets, there are 12 of Vietnamese people with a population of 168 people. In Minh Huong commune, there are 83 Vietnamese people and 138 Duong (Chinese) people. The remaining 25 hamlets are of Chenla people with a population of 279. On that basis, the emperor imposed the following tax policy: 12 hamlets and villages of Vietnamese people follow the policy applied in towns; people of Minh Huong commune follow the policies applied to Minh Huong people living in the city; fields and gardens are divided into 3 levels and follow the policies applied in Gia Dinh province. The remaining 259 plots of field, mostly are gravel soil, are still exempted from tax. For Chenla people, only annual tax of 1 tien (1 mace) per person is collected” (NHBND, 2006, vol.2, p. 359).

Regarding demographics, according to *Dai Nam nhat thong chi* (The Comprehensive Encyclopaedia of the Great South), under the reign of Emperor Gia Long, the population in Ha Tien was 1,500 people; by the time of Emperor Tu Duc, it increased to 5,793. As the population grew bigger, administrative units accordingly were formed one after another. In 1825, Ha Tien District was established, in charge of two cantons of Ha Thanh and Ha Nhuan. By 1832, Ha Tien Province was established to manage Khai Bien Prefecture and three districts of Ha Chau, Long Xuyen and Kien Giang. Khai Bien Prefecture used to have the name of An Bien; Ha Chau District was originally Ha Tien District. According to the report of officials of Ha Tien Province, by 1838, there had been 2,000 acres of land reclaimed in Khai Bien Prefecture. In 1839, two new districts were established in Ha Tien, namely Ha Am and Ha Duong. Ha Am District included the land of 4 cantons formerly belonging to Chan Thanh District, on the left bank of Vinh Te River with a population of over 1,040 people and an area of more than 1,150 acres of land. Ha Duong District, on the other hand, covered the land of four cantons on the right bank of Vinh Te River, with a population of over 1,480 people

and an area of more than 2,080 acres of land. At the same time, Tinh Bien Prefecture was also established. The administrator of the prefecture was also in charge of Ha Am and Ha Duong Districts (NHBND, 2006).

For the land of Chau Doc (An Giang), in 1827, Nguyen Van Thoai - the governor of Chau Doc, asked to recruit men for land reclamation. The emperor allowed him to set up three teams of Chau Doc the First, Chau Doc the Second and Chau Doc the Third, and two teams of An Hai the First and An Hai the Second. With the easygoing policy of recruiting people, by 1830, in Chau Doc, 41 communes and villages had been established, with a population of more than 800 people (NHBND, 2006, vol.3, pp. 88, 450). By 1832, “41 communes, villages, wards and streets had been established with more than 1,100 people and 9 plots of land”, and after 2 years, there were “15 newly established villages and streets with more than 300 people and 5 plots of field at the mountain foot” (NHBND, 2006, vol.3, pp. 88, 450).

Although the population in hamlets and villages increased over time, in general there had not been any significant progress: the population was yet crowded, and the land was yet to be truly expanded. Faced with that situation, in 1832, Emperor Minh Mang decided to establish An Giang Province. The province included 2 districts of Vinh An and Vinh Dinh belonging to Vinh Long, combined with Chau Doc’s land. The administrative boundary of An Giang Province at this time included 2 prefectures of Tuy Bien, consisting the districts of Dong Xuyen and Tay Xuyen; and Tan Thanh, consisting of the districts of Phong Phu and Vinh Anh. By 1835, An Giang annexed the land of Ba Thac to establish Ba Xuyen Prefecture. Ba Xuyen Prefecture recruited people to establish villages and hamlets. In 1840, the population here was over 80 people with more than 170 acres of field. By then, An Giang occupied the entire right bank of Hau River and the land of Vinh An (Sa Dec) in the north, which was cut off from Vinh Thanh Town (Nguyen Dinh Dau, 1994).

Hamlets grew more and more. In 1838, along Vinh Te Canal to That Son, many hamlets and villages were established, such as: Vinh Te mountain village (from Chau Doc), Nhon Hoa village, An Quy village, Than Nhon village (between An Quy and Vinh Bao), Vinh Bao village (between Than Nhon and Long Thanh), Long Thanh village (between Vinh Bao and Vinh Nguon), Toan Thanh village (between Nhon Hoa and An Thanh), Vinh Gia village (between Vinh Dien and Vinh Thong), Vinh Lac village (adjacent to An Nong) (Son Nam, 1997, p. 94).

In 1840, Ba Xuyen Prefecture in An Giang recruited 80 people to established hamlets and reclaimed 170 acres of land. In 1840, the Southern provinces reported the number of abandoned lands that were reclaimed as follows: Vinh Long: 1,900 acres, An Giang: 260 acres, Ha Tien: 670 acres. In the same year, the officials of An Giang Province said that behind the citadel, more than 770 acres

were reclaimed, and more than 200 acres were still left abandoned; and asked to build roads and canals to facilitate the reclamation. In 1854, across the whole Southern region, there were 124 hamlets, of which 32 belonged to Gia Dinh, 60 to Vinh Long, 23 to An Giang and 9 to Dinh Tuong. In 1836, there were 97407 acres of land in An Giang. Among which, the used area was 96,865 acres, while the abandoned land only accounted for a very small percentage of 542 acres. The area of land in Chau Doc - Ha Tien was nearly 500 acres (Le Van Nam, 2000, p. 54).

Through the results of land reclamation in the southern border provinces, we see that in the first half of the 19th century, the Nguyen Dynasty implemented a series of different measures and policies. In addition to political and military policies, the royal court also developed plantations, built irrigation works, developed traffic on water and land, established hamlets and villages, provided cultivation tools, rice seeds, water buffaloes and cows, and did not bind citizens to obligations of paying taxes, etc. All of these policies aim to encourage as many immigrants to the Southern border to reclaim the land and establish businesses as possible. The goal of the Nguyen Dynasty is not only for socioeconomic development but also for the sake of national security and border protection.

4.2. Formation of Coastal Defense System and Deployment of Patrols and Crackdown on Pirates in the South

Through different historical periods, the sea in the south (including the southeast and southwest) have undergone many administrative changes. Under the administration of Nguyen lords and the Nguyen Dynasty (from the 17th century to the 19th century), the southwestern sea covered the entire coastline, surface area, offshore islands and archipelagos under the control of Ha Tien Town. From 1832 (the 13th year of Minh Mang era) onward, these were under the governance of provinces of Dinh Tuong, Vinh Long and Ha Tien (Tran Thi Mai, 2013, p. 76). With favorable geographical position for maritime and commercial activities, as well as abundant natural resources, these waters had long been considered critical by many feudal countries, especially Dai Viet, Chenla and Siam. The Siamese had had many political and military schemes to take the control of these waters from the Nguyen Dynasty (Nguyen Van Hiep, Huynh Tam Sang, 2017); therefore, the Nguyen Dynasty also implemented a series of policies to exploit, protect and assert sovereignty over the sea in the South.

4.2.1. The Construction of Coastal Defense System in the Southern Sea by the Nguyen Dynasty

In 1802, after the establishment of the dynasty, in addition to expanding administration on land and enforcing many measures to protect the Southern land border, the Nguyen Dynasty also set

up mechanisms to manage the southern sea. Immediately after coming to power and implementing measures to cement his domestic rule, Emperor Gia Long issued a decree to remind the court officials and soldiers to remember the difficulties and hardships in asserting sovereignty over the sea and islands: “Con Lon, Phu Quoc, Thi Nai, Cu Mong - they took us hundreds of difficult battles to come to this day. Never rest on our laurels, never sleep on our victory - that is exactly the way to protect the country and the people” (NHBND, 2002, vol.1, p. 811).

In order to solidly protect the Southern sea, the Nguyen Dynasty paid great attention to developing the naval force and building forts at critical places. In addition to deploying the previously established coastal patrols (NHBND, 2002, vol.1, p. 347), in 1826, Emperor Minh Mang established three more patrol teams in Bien Hoa and Vinh Long (Bui Gia Khanh, 2018, p. 109). In 1828, Minh Mang regulated that the number of ships distributed to Gia Dinh is 100, and 145 others are distributed to 5 towns (NHBND, 2002, vol.1, pp. 797-799). In the 12th year of Minh Mang era (1831), the royal court ordered the Governor General of Gia Dinh to inspect the strategic places for building forts in Ha Tien. Accordingly, Kim Du fort was built in Ha Tien where 160 soldiers and 3 ships were stationed, which became a crucial stronghold in the protection of the sea in Ha Tien (NHBND, 2010, p. 1646). In 1832, Minh Mang commanded the construction of forts and the equipment of guns, ammunition, weapons, ships and soldiers on the two archipelagos of Con Dao and Phu Quoc, as well as the supply of weapons for locals to join in the defense (NHBND, 2010, p. 1646). Then, in 1835, the royal court equipped 6 southern provinces with 340 cannons at forts, stations and other fortifications for sea defense. The cannons were divided as follows: Gia Dinh Province: 70; Bien Hoa Province: 32; Vinh Long Province: 36; Dinh Tuong Province: 22; An Giang Province: 100; Ha Tien Province: 80 (NHBND, 2007, vol. 4, pp. 824-825).

Aware of the critical role of constructing sea and islands military defense bases in the prevention of attacks from Siam, in addition to remote defense solutions, Emperor Minh Mang also strengthened the defense system and rearranged the military forces in the South by reorganizing the naval infantry of provinces in a more formal and regulated manner. At that time, each province, depending on their location, would have 1-2 naval troops. The defense system and naval forces of the Nguyen Dynasty in the South after 1832 are recorded in *Dai Nam Hoi dien su le* as follows (NHBND, 2005, vol.5, pp. 678-686):

NAME OF PROVINCE	DEFENSIVE FORTIFICATIONS	NAVAL FORCE	NUMBER OF SHIPS DISTRIBUTED (1834)
Phien An/ Gia Dinh	Can Gio base, Dong Ninh base, Loi Lap (Xoai Rap) base, Lat Giang base	Right and Left Naval Guard (1,040 soldiers in 1836)	51, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 Phien An ships with 3 alder wood boats • 5 marine ships • 10 pear wood ships • 10 black-painted ships • 10 red-painted ships • 10 alder wood planks
Bien Hoa	Long Hung base, Phuc Thang base	Right and Left Naval Guard (800 soldiers in 1836)	37, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 Bien An ship with 1 alder wood boat • 9 marine ships • 10 pear wood ships • 10 black-painted ships • 10 red-painted ships
Vinh Long	Co Chien base, Dinh An base, Ban Con base, Ngao Chau base, Con Lon base-Thanh Hai fortress	Right and Left Naval Guard (1,079 soldiers in 1836)	69 ships for Vinh Long Province and Uy Vien fort: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 Vinh Yen and Vinh Tinh ships with 2 alder wood boats • 5 marine ships • 10 pear wood ships • 10 black-painted ships • 20 red-painted ships • 20 small boats.
Dinh Tuong	Dai Hai base - Thua Duc station, Tieu Hai base- Tu Linh station, Tieu Hai estuary fort	Right and Left Naval Guard (1,000 soldiers in 1834)	37, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 Dinh Tinh ship with 1 alder wood boat • 5 marine ships • 10 pear wood ships • 10 black-painted ships • 10 red-painted ships
An Giang	Tran Di base, My Thanh base (1836)	An Giang Naval Guard (500 soldiers in 1834)	32, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 An Tinh ship with 1 alder wood boat • 5 marine ships • 5 pear wood ships • 10 red-painted ships • 10 small boats.
Ha Tien	The Long Wall, Kim Du fort - Phu Anh Long Wall, Phu Quoc Fortress, Phu Quoc base, Kim Du base, Dai Giang base	Ha Tien Naval Guard (7 troops in 1836)	30, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 Dien Hai ships with 5 alder wood boats • 5 marine ships • 5 pear wood ships • 10 red-painted ships

In 1835, Emperor Minh Mang issued a royal decree that said: "Our country is in the south, the sea accounts for a large part of our territory, therefore the navy is very important. The naval force must be trained to know the sea well, so that later they can be useful in battle. Now the naval army in the citadel as well as in coastal localities have grown. Therefore, chiefs and commanders in the citadels and the provinces, based on the actual situation, must train the naval force to proficiently operate on the water, to thoroughly know the way on the rivers and the sea, where it is deep and where it is shallow, where the islets, reefs, falls, etc. are to avoid... If they don't put efforts into training the soldiers to be ready for battle, if they let down their guard, then all will be punished severely" (NHBND, 2007, vol. 4, pp. 708-709).

Also, in the first half of the 19th century, the Nguyen Dynasty had many expeditions to measure and draw maps of the sea across the country. For the southern sea, "*Xiem La quoc lo trinh tap luc*" (Collected Records of Itineraries to Siam) is a document on the paths (on land and water) from the Southern region to Siam and some other countries in the Southeast Asia, as well as some islands in the Gulf of Thailand. This rather special document was used to illustrate the map of Siam presented by the envoys Tong Phuoc Ngoan and Duong Van Chau after their mission to Siam (in 1809) (Pham Hoang Quan, 2011, p. 61, 83). It can be said that the southern coastal roads and paths have been described quite completely, proving the attention paid by the royal court to this area.

4.2.2. Deployment of Patrols and Crackdowns on Pirates

Along with the construction of fortifications and the arrangement of defensive forces along the southern coast, patrolling and ensuring sea security were also focused on by the Nguyen Dynasty. A threat that has existed for many generations in the Gulf of Thailand is the problem of piracy. From 414 AD, Fah Hsein, a Chinese traveler from Ceylon to Java referred to the pirates of the southern sea with horror: "in that sea area, pirates often abruptly attack and destroy everything" (Vinit Muntarbhorn, 1981, p.483). As the trade between Europe and the East boomed after the geographical discoveries from the 16th century, piracy became increasingly rampant. A report by the Cantonese government in 1767 stated that Chinese merchants passing through the waters of the Gulf of Thailand frequently encountered pirates. Chen Wenbiao, a merchant who used to pass through this sea said, from April to May 1766, as he arrived at the Gulf of Thailand, he could not enter the gulf since it had been occupied by pirates, and 5 Siamese cargo ships were robbed of goods (Masuda Erika, 2007, p. 81). Facing the complexity of piracy issue in the Gulf of Thailand, the government led by Mac Thien Tu in Ha Tien sent Tran Dai Luc to bring troops and ships to defend Chan Bon, and patrol the

islands of Co Cong, Co Cot and Dan Kham. The naval force of the Mac clan defeated the pirate gang of Hoac Nhien (from Chaozhou) on Co Cong island (NHBND, 2002, vol.1, pp. 171). Mac Thien Tu also organized many raids to eliminate pirate gangs in the Gulf of Thailand in 1769, 1770 and 1774 (Nguyen The Trung, 2013, p. 55).

Under the rule of the Nguyen Dynasty in the first half of the 19th century, patrols and defenses at sea were consolidated and organized more strictly. Not so long after ascending the throne, Emperor Gia Long quickly re-established the previous Hoang Sa and Bac Hai patrol teams. The first volume of *Dai Nam thuc luc chinh bien* (Principal Records of the Great South) wrote: “Vo Van Phu is appointed as the commander to guard Sa Ky estuary. Meanwhile, Nguyen Van Duc is appointed to administer the three regions of Can Gio, Vung Tau and Dong Trach” (NHBND, 2002, vol.1, pp. 566). The Hoang Sa and Bac Hai patrols had operated effectively on the sea in the first ten years of the 19th century. Then, due to the new requirements of the exploitation, construction and protection of the sea and islands, Emperor Gia Long gradually integrated Hoang Sa and Bac Hai patrols into the Nguyen Dynasty's naval force, thus standardized the sea and islands defense force, turning paramilitary teams into regular state military forces with modern ships, boats and weapons as well as strict discipline (Tran Nam Tien, 2014, pp. 92-93).

In 1810, Gia Long regulated the freight term of ships and boats managed by the state. Before a ship sets sail, the defense command governor of the locality must be informed of. The sea must be patrolled day and night; if any ship needs to pass, assistance must be provided (NHBND, 2002, vol.1, p. 795). In addition, the Nguyen Dynasty also regularly deployed naval forces to patrol the sea, crack down pirates and protect merchant boats and fishermen at sea. In the 3rd year of Minh Mang era (1822), the royal court sent a troop of nearly 200 soldiers from Gia Dinh, which was fully equipped with ships and guns, to Ha Tien's waters to patrol and defeat the invaders (NHBND, 2005, vol.5, pp. 424-425). In 1829, Minh Mang again issued a decree that said: "from Quang Tri to the north, from Quang Nam to the south, quickly send 3-4 military ships to patrol. If encountering strangely-shaped ships from Qing (China), or the ships have guns, weapons and looted objects, and the situation is suspicious, immediately take them back to the town city” (NHBND, 2005, vol. 5, p. 225).

Regarding the defense force, in 1832, 4 artillery teams in Gia Dinh city were converted into 2 artillery teams in An Giang to defend Kim Du fort in Ha Tien and Chau Doc fort (NHBND, 2005, vol. 5, p. 170). In 1835, Emperor Minh Mang ordered six southern provinces to focus on building naval and artillery forces to coordinate coastal defense and grant each province a telescope to facilitate sea observation (NHBND, 2007, vol. 4, p. 839).

As for Phu Quoc archipelago, due to its important position in the defense of the waters in the Gulf of Thailand, the Nguyen Dynasty assigned Co Ha Phu - one of the most elite military forces of the royal court to station on Phu Quoc Island. Co Ha Phu had about 300 soldiers stationed on the island, which were divided into 8 teams (NHBND, 2005, vol.5, p. 171). In 1839, Emperor Minh Mang ordered the reinforcement of the navy and sea patrol across the country, and added Binh Hai ship and Tinh Hai ship to the sea patrol force of the Southern provinces (NHBND, 2005, vol. 5, p. 430).

In addition to strengthening the imperial regular army to protect the sea, the Nguyen Dynasty also paid attention to building militia force and creating conditions for civil boats to be armed against pirates. In the 3rd year of Minh Mang era (1822), the emperor ordered the defense commander in Phu Quoc to organize citizens of hamlets into 10 teams, each build a large boat equipped with weapons to patrol the sea. By 1834, the royal court expanded militia patrols on the sea throughout the country: "The governors, chief commanders, administration commissioners and envoys at coastal localities are advised to make a list of inhabited islands in their territory and order the people there to quickly build and repair their fishing boats. Where there is large population, build 3 boats; where there is small population, build 2. Each boat must be able to accommodate about 20 people. The repair costs will be covered by the State. They also need to give long spears, rifles and ammunition to the people on islands for use in patrolling" (NHBND, 2005, vol. 5, p. 426).

Thus, in the first half of the 19th century, the Nguyen Dynasty, especially during the reign of Gia Long and Minh Mang, had specific strategies and actions to strengthen the fortification system and build a rather complete coastal defense system, including regular troops and militias, as well as create conditions for civil boats to be armed against pirates in order to protect and exercise sovereignty over the sea and islands in the South. In order to strictly manage activities of ships and boats, the Nguyen Dynasty also issued many edicts and decrees with diverse contents, such as inspecting ships passing through estuaries and setting sail in groups; strictly managing the ships entering and exiting canals and estuaries through "work diaries", organizing the search for ships and boats in distress or forbidding ships from setting sail if necessary (Phan Thanh Hai, 2014, p. 44). However, due to many factors, this defense became weaker under the reign of later emperors.

5. Conclusion

Since the 17th century, the Southern region has become a vibrant economic center not only of Vietnam but also of the Southeast Asia. In 1802, after establishing the dynasty and inheriting the

results from the exploitation and protection of sovereignty over the border on land and sea in the South from the time of Nguyen lords, emperors of the Nguyen Dynasty continued to implement many appropriate measures to effectively protect the border and the sea in the South in line with the context at that time. The policies of land reclamation and plantation establishment at mainland border areas in general and the organization of activities for defense and patrol of the Southern sea, coast and islands in particular are effective measures because, in terms of economic goals, reclamation will increase the area of agricultural land and the amount of rice and other commodities produced, thus ensure the needs of citizens along the coast and on islands. In terms of politics, land reclamation and hamlet establishment are ways to effectively affirm sovereignty. National security and defense issues of the southern land border, sea and islands are also ensured thanks to the system of villages and residential communities (Nguyen The Trung, 2013).

Although the results archived are still modest, the increasing area of land cleared and the number of communes and hamlets established in the border area in the first half of the 19th century show that the establishment of sovereignty by borderlines is only the first step - bringing people to live there and turning the land into their residence and place of work is a decisive factor in the protection and affirmation of sovereignty because, once people have gathered and settled in an area, their sense of protecting and affirming their ownership of that land is also soon formed. In addition, the fact that the Nguyen Dynasty controls and owns a large sea area with many economic potentials has clearly demonstrated Dai Viet's will for national independence and sovereignty over the sea and islands. Therefore, the implementation of a series of measures and policies by the Nguyen Dynasty for immigrants to settle down and conduct businesses, thereby protecting the border and the sea - critical areas that are directly related to the prosperity of the country in the first half of the 19th century is an appropriate choice to strengthen the national borders and territorial sovereignty.

Acknowledgement

“This research is funded by Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City (VNU-HCM) under grant number ĐA 2019-18b-01”.

References

Bui Gia Khanh (2018). *Naval force of the Nguyen Dynasty (1802-1884)*. Hanoi: National Politics-Truth Publishing House.

- Buttinger, Joseph (1972). *A dragon defiant: a short history of Vietnam*. New York – Washington: Praeger Publishers.
- Chau Dat Quang (2017). *Notes on the Customs of Chenla*. Hanoi: World Publishing House.
- Choi Byung Wook (2010). *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mang (1820-1841)*. Hanoi: World Publishing House.
- Cooke, Nola (1997). “The Myth of the Restoration: Dang Trong Influences in the Spiritual Life of the Early Nguyen Dynasty (1802-47)”, in: Reid, Anthony, 1997, *The Last Stand of Asian Autonomies – Responses to Modernity in the Diverse States of Southeast Asia and Korea, 1750-1900*, ed. Anthony Reid, 265-296. London: Houndmills.
- Cortambert E. & Rosny L. (1862). *Cochin china painting*, Paris: Armand Le Chevalier, p. 6.
- Dauphin Meunier A (1965). *Cambodia*, Paris.
- David Joel Steinberg (ed) (1987). *In Search of Southeast Asia : A Modern History*. University of Hawaii Press.
- Doan Nguyet Linh, Nguyen Hoang Vinh (2005). Relations of Viet- Siam in the Beginning of the XIX Century. *Can Tho University Scientific research journal*, vol 4, pp. 238-244.
- Duong The Hien (2017). The military of Nguyen Dynasty in the area of An Giang from 1802 to 1867. *An Giang University Journal of Science*, vol. 15 (3), pp. 89- 96.
- Hong Thai (1986). A few Details about the relationship between Vietnam and Southeast Asian countries in the calendar History. *Historical Research Journal*, vol. 5, pp.14-21.
- Le Quy Don (2017). *Miscellaneous Chronicles of the Pacified Frontier*. Hanoi: Culture and Information Publishing House.
- Le Thi My Trinh (2009). Dai Viet - Chan Lap relations before the twentieth century. *Master's thesis in Vietnamese History, Ho Chi Minh City University of Education*.
- Le Van Nam (2000). “The situation of settlement and exploration in Chau Doc - Ha Tien in the 19th century”. *Historical Research Journal*, Issue 2 (309).
- Li, Tana (1998). *Nguyen Cochin china - Southern Vietnam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press.
- Lockyer Ch., (1711). *An Account of the Trade in India*, London: Samuel Crouch.
- Masuda Erika 2007. “The fall of Ayutthaya and Siam’s disrupted order of tribute to China (1767-1782)”, *Taiwan Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 4(2), 75-128.
- Nguyen Dinh Dau (1994). *Research on geography of Ha Tien Province*. Ho Chi Minh City: Ho Chi Minh City Publishing House.
- Nguyen Minh Tuong (1996). *Administration reform under the reign of Minh Mạng*. Social Sciences Publishing House.
- Nguyen Quang Ngoc (2017). *The land of the South from the beginning of the 17th century to the middle of the 19th century*. Hanoi: National Politics Publishing House.
- Nguyen The Trung (2013). The process of establishing and exploiting the sovereignty of the Nguyen lords and the Nguyen Dynasty over the Southwestern sea (from the 18th century to the first half of the 19th century). *Master's thesis in Vietnamese History, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, VNU-HCM City*.

Nguyen Van Hiep, Huynh Tam Sang (2017). *The sea and islands of the South in the process of development and integration*. Ho Chi Minh City: Ho Chi Minh City National University Publishing House.

NHBND (National History Bureau of the Nguyen Dynasty) (1972). *Veritable Records of the Great South (Onan Minoru)*, vol. 38. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House.

NHBND (National History Bureau of the Nguyen Dynasty) (2002). *Veritable Records of the Great South (Onan Minoru)*, vol. 1, 2. Hanoi: Education Publishing House.

NHBND (National History Bureau of the Nguyen Dynasty) (2005). *Royal compilation on Historical Facts and Events in Dai Nam*, vol. 5. Hue: Thuan Hoa Publishing House.

NHBND (National History Bureau of the Nguyen Dynasty) (2006). *Veritable Records of the Great South (Onan Minoru)*, vol. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. Hanoi: Education Publishing House.

NHBND (National History Bureau of the Nguyen Dynasty) (2007). *Veritable Records of the Great South (Onan Minoru)*, vol. 4. Hanoi: Education Publishing House.

NHBND (National History Bureau of the Nguyen Dynasty) (2010). *Core Records of Minh Mạng Reign (It's about time)*. Hue: Thuan Hoa Publishing House.

NHBND (National History Bureau of the Nguyen Dynasty) (2006). *Dai Nam Comprehensive Encyclopaedia (Tainan Unification History)*. Hue: Thuan Hoa Publishing House.

Paulin Vial (1997). *The early years of the French Southern period*. Materials from History Faculty of Hanoi University of Social Sciences and Humanities.

Pham Hoang Quan (2011). "Collected Records of Itineraries to Siam", *Research and Development Journal*, Issue 6 (89), pp. 61-83.

Phan Huy Le (2017). *The Southern region of the process of formation and development*. Hanoi: National Politics Publishing House.

Phan Khoang (1969). *Vietnamese History in Cochinchina*. Hanoi: Literature Publishing House.

Phan Thanh Hai (2014). Emperor Minh Mang and his strategic vision of sea and islands represented by images on the Nine Tripod Cauldrons, *Hue Then and Now Magazine*, Issue 4 (49).

Raoul Marc Jennar (1998). *Les Frontières du Cambodge contemporain*. INALCO, Paris.

Reid, Anthony (1988). *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450–1680*. Hew Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Silvestre, Jean (1915). "The insurrection of Gia Dinh, the revolt of Khoi (1832-1834)." *Revue Indochinoise* 7-8, pp. 1-37.

Son Nam (1997). *History of reclamation in the South*. Ho Chi Minh City: Tre Publishing House.

Ta Chi Dai Tuong (1973). *History of Vietnam Civil War 1771- 1802*. Saigon: Saigon History Publishing House.

TNARM (The National Archives and Records Management) (2010). *Summary contents of the texts "Chau ban" of the Nguyen Dynasty*. Hanoi: Publishing House of Information and Culture.

Tran Bach Dang (2019). *Cultural Geography of Ho Chi Minh City*, vol. 1. Ho Chi Minh City: Ho Chi Minh City Publishing House.

Tran Nam Tien (2014). *Hoang Sa flotilla in the history of establishing and protecting Vietnam's sovereignty over the sea and islands*. Ho Chi Minh City: Culture-Art Publishing House.

- Tran Thi Mai (2013). The Process of Assertion and Defense of the Sovereignty over the Vietnam's South west Waters During the Nguyen Lords and Nguyen Dynasty (from the 17th to 19th centuries). *Science & Technology Development Journal*, vol 16, no.X1, pp. 76-85.
- Tran Thi Vinh (2002). Political institutions of the Nguyen Dynasty under the reign of Gia Long and Minh Mang. *Historical Studies*, no.6, pp. 1-7.
- Tran Van Giau (1973). *The Development of Thought in Vietnam from the Nineteenth Century to the August Revolution*, vol. 1. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House.
- Trinh Hoai Duc (1999). *Gazetteer of Gia Dinh Citadel*. General Publishing House.
- Vitit Muntarbhorn (1981). Asylum-seekers at sea and piracy in the Gulf of Thailand. *Belgian Review of International Law, Belgian magazine for International Law*, Le numero.
- Vu Duc Liem (2017). *The formation of the Vietnam-Cambodia border during the time of the Nguyen Dynasty*. <https://tiasang.com.vn>. September 15.
- Vu Minh Giang (2006). Vietnam's Territorial Sovereignty over the Southern region. *Political Theory Journal*, no 12, pp. 31-36.
- Vu Minh Giang (2019). *History of Southern Vietnam*. Ho Chi Minh City: Ho Chi Minh City National University Publishing House.
- Yu, Insun (1978). "Law and Family in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Vietnam", PhD diss., University of Michigan.