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Lao Historiography and Historians: Case Study of the War Between Bangkok and the Lao in 1827

MAYOURY & PHEUIPHANH NGAOSYVATHN

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Vientiane was a flourishing city. The British emissary John Crawford reporting what he was told by one informant in Bangkok in 1822 about Vientiane (then called Lang Xang, “Lan-Chang, always considered the capital of Lao”) wrote, “It was described to me as being as populous as Bangkok.”¹ It was also said that Mom Chao Thap, a Siamese general, could not help but praise Vientiane when he saw the city for the first time.² Mom Chao Thap was part of Senborirak’s army that was charged with carrying out the order of Rama III of Siam to return Vientiane to the wild animals and to leave nothing behind but weeds and water.³ The order was executed twice, in 1827 and again in 1828, both in an attempt to crush the forces of Chao Anou.

Forty years after these events, during a stopover in Vientiane, the French Mekhong Exploration Mission spent the two days of 3 and 4 April 1867, interviewing the few survivors of Lan Xang on the historical traditions of the kingdom of Vientiane.⁴ Louis De Carne, representative of the Quai d’Orsay wrote, “the Laotians were subject to a mass extermination or deportation, their capital sacked as had been Jerusalem by the Roman army....”⁵ Exactly one hundred years later, D.G.E. Hall echoed this when he stated, “the Siamese made a complete holocaust of Vientiane”.⁶ More recently, Arthur Dommen wrote, “the Siamese, who by now were embarked on a policy of vigorous imprudent challenge by sacking Vieng Chang as the Romans had destroyed Carthage after the Second Punic war”.⁷

Until now, the history of this conflict has been propagated and monopolised by one source — *The Royal Chronicle of the Third Reign of the Bangkok Dynasty* by Chao Phraya Thiphakarawong (1812–70).⁸ This historical document is considered the finest of

¹John Crawford, *Journal of an embassy to the courts of Siam and Cochin China*, Intr. David K. Wyatt (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 446–47.

²Mom Chao Thap, “*Nirat thap Vientiane*”, in Department of Fine Arts, *Collection of documents concerning the suppression of the revolt of Vientiane* (in Thai) (Bangkok: Sophon, 1930), pp. 90–98.

³Chaophraya Thiphakarawong, *The Royal Chronicle of the Third Reign of the Bangkok Dynasty* (in Thai) (Bangkok: Khuru Sapha, 1961), pp. 64, 75.

⁴Francis Garnier, “Voyage d’exploration en Indo Chine”, *Revue Tour du Monde* (Paris, 1870–71), p. 394.

⁵Louis M. De Carne, “Exploration du Mekong. III/Vienchan et la conquete Siamoise”, *Revue Des Deux Mondes*, Tome LXXII (Paris, 1868), p. 469.

⁶D.G.E. Hall, *A History of Southeast Asia* (London: Macmillan Press, 1968), p. 451.

⁷Arthur J. Dommen, *Laos, Keystone of Indochina* (New York: Westview Profiles, 1986), p. 22.

⁸About this author cf. Charnvit Kasetsiri, “Thai Historiography from Ancient Times to the Modern Period”, in *Perceptions of the Past in South-east Asia*, ed. Anthony Reid and David Marr, ASAA Southeast Asia Publications, Series (Singapore, 1979), p. 162.

“Palace histories”⁹ aimed essentially at broadening “admiration for Thai history, culture and society...”, “Thai history” meaning the history of Thai kings and their activities, “Thai culture”, the culture approved by the court of Bangkok and practised within its environs, and “Thai society” meaning central Thai society.¹⁰ These “works of piety”¹¹ propagated

... the view that Thailand was usually victimized, not only by the Burmese and their sometime allies in Lanna Thai and the Mon States but also by the treachery of rulers in the Cambodian and Lao tributary states who took advantage of periods when the central Thai Kingdom appeared weak in order to revolt or attack it. In defence of various Thai aggressions ... it ... stressed the ‘simple right to retribution’. Perhaps it never occurred [to them] ... to examine further the warlike nature of the Thai themselves. Rather than to try to justify the subjugation of many ancient peoples by Ramkamhaeng and other rulers, (it) merely gloried in the fact because it was Thai.¹²

However even in Thailand, there has been a new approach towards the events of 1827. For example, there are now Thawatt Poonothoke’s illuminating work on “Pheun Vieng”; Chalong Soontravanij’s article, “The History of Thai-Lao relations prior to the twentieth century”; and Pansa Sinsawat, “The Bangkok-Vientiane relationship during the Reign of king Rama III, A.D. 1824–1827”.¹³ It is also worth noting the thoughtful works of Kennon Breazeale on “The integration of the Lao states into the Thai kingdom” and of Snit Smuckarn and Kennon Breazeale entitled *The Phuan: A Culture in Search of Survival*, although a breakthrough on this topic had occurred earlier with an article by David K. Wyatt.¹⁴

The Lao sources on the events of 1827–29 have become, unfortunately, rare objects. These sources, the palm leaf manuscripts, are highly perishable, being subject to inclemency of weather, insects, age, and also war. With the change of regimes, valuable manuscripts on Lao history have been flowing to Western countries with those

⁹Expressions of Thadeus Flood, “Jit Phumisak”, *Indochina Chronicle* (1977), p. 12.

¹⁰Kochapun Na Taksin, “Thai Politics Through Southern Eyes”, *Southeast Asia Chronicle*, No. 69. 1–2/1980, p. 23.

¹¹Expression of W.W. Wolters, cited in Carl A. Trocki, “Review Essay: Thailand: Power and Paradigms”, *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 13 (April–June 1981): 64.

¹²Kennon Breazeale, “The historical works of Prince Damrong Rachanuphap” (M.A. thesis, Hawaii University, 1971), pp. 165–66.

¹³Thawatt Poonothok, *Study on the account “Pheun Vieng”: Documents on the Conflict with Chao Anou in the Perception of the Isarn people* (Bangkok: Thai Association for the History, 1982), 74pp.; Thawatt Poonothok, *Analysis of the account of Isarn* (Bangkok: Thai Institute of Science and Education, Thammasat University, 1980), 191pp.; Chalong Soontravanij, “History of the Thai-Lao relations before the twentieth century”, in *Coalition for Peace and Development: “Seminar on the Thai-Lao Friendship Relations”* (Bangkok, 21 June 1986), pp. 1–9; Pansa Sinsawat, “The Bangkok-Vientiane relationship during the Reign of king Rama III. A.D. 1824–1827” (Ph.D. thesis, Bangkok, Chulalongkorn University, 1978), 177pp. All in Thai.

¹⁴David K. Wyatt, “Siam and Laos: 1767–1827”, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 4, no. 2 (1975): 13–31; Kennon Breazeale, “The integration of the Lao states into the Thai kingdom” (Ph.D. thesis, Faculty of Oriental Studies, Oxford University, 1975), 335pp.; Snit Smuckarn and Kennon Breazeale, *The Phuan: A Culture in Search of Survival* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

who left the country in the wake of 1975–76.¹⁵ At one time these sources were abundant. According to the oral tradition of Louang Prabang as reported by the patriarch of the buddhist monks, it took at least seven elephants in 1827 to carry the most important manuscripts from Vientiane to Bangkok.¹⁶ There also seemed to be some reticence about discussing the events of this period. Henri Deydier reported in 1954:

Moreover, I understand that in Laos as soon as one touches on the history of the events concerning the last one hundred or one hundred fifty years, one is ensnared in current politics, and also into the history of families. All the records concerning the provinces have disappeared. Some aspects of the history of Laos are just family records. All the quarrels of yesterday are still present.¹⁷

However, it is still possible for a lucky and persevering researcher to ferret out the Lao primary sources of this period. As far as we know, there are only two researchers who have used these sources: Maha Sila Viravong and Maha Kham Champakeomany.¹⁸

We will limit ourselves, in this paper, to the documents “Chotmaihet Yo Muong Vientiane” (Short Chronicle of Vientiane) and “Phongsavadane Muong Vientiane” (Annals of Vientiane).¹⁹

In Vat Phakeo of Vientiane, there is a copy of Chotmaihet Yo Muong Vientiane which chronologically relates the events from 1671 to 1836. There is another copy in the Royal Palace of Louang Prabang (converted into the National Museum since 1979) which is basically similar to the first copy except that it focuses mainly on the events of the capital of the kingdom of Louang Prabang during the nineteenth century. This copy lists the same events with a gap from 1712 to 1755. A third copy called “Chao Kattiya”, written in 1894, relates the events from 1698 to 1834. A fourth one, anonymous, and also published in the *Prachum Phongsawadan* (Bangkok)²⁰ records the events from 1698 to 1858. The fifth copy is the one published and translated by Auguste Pavie under the title “Chronology of the history of the country of Lan-Chang Hom Khao” covering the period 1559–1845.²¹

¹⁵The first National Lao Seminar on Manuscripts was held in Vientiane, 10–13 March 1988. The Seminar sought to get some idea of the documents in existence in the country, and to urge provincial representatives responsible for cultural work to make an inventory of existing manuscripts, and master techniques to preserve them. We have, in the course of our research, tried to find the temple manuscripts listed by Louis Finot, “inventaire des manuscrits des pagodes due Laos”, *Bulletin de l'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient* (1965): 429–545, but 90 per cent of these have already disappeared.

¹⁶Interview of the Venerable Patriarch of the Buddhists, Khamchanh Virachit, Louang Prabang, 24 April 1987.

¹⁷Henri Deydier, *Lo Kapala. Genies, totems et sorciers du Nord Laos* (Paris: Plon, 1954), p. 117. See the same feeling expressed by M.L. Manich, *History of Laos, including the history of Lannathai* (Chiangmai Chalermmit, Bangkok, 1967), pp. 1–2.

¹⁸Maha Sila Viravong, “*Phongsavadane Lao*” (Lao History), Ministry of Education Nationale (Vientiane, 1957); Maha Kham Champakeomany, “*Pavatsat Lao*” (Lao History), 1980, 9 volumes typewritten.

¹⁹These manuscripts must have existed in numerous copies. Cf. Louis Finot, “Inventaire des manuscrits....”

²⁰*Prachum Phongsawadan*, Vol. 44 (Bangkok: Khuru Sapha, 1969), pp. 131–52.

²¹Mission Pavie, *Indochine 1879–1895. Etudes Diverses II: Recherches sur l'histoire du Cambodge, du Laos et du Siam* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1898), pp. 94–102.

As for secondary sources, they can be found in *Phongsavadane Muong Vientiane*. C. Archaimbault²² mentioned them as part of *Uparat Fonds* (or *U Fonds*). Another copy is at the Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient in Paris (catalogued as: Laotian P 2 (3) under the title "Translation of the history of Vien-Chan Tha-Bouli sisata-nakhana hout Lan-Sang-Hom Khao").

The Short Chronicle of Vientiane laconically mentions that during "the year Sakalat 185, year of the Horse, the Thai came to tattoo all the inhabitants of the Lao cities, except Vientiane...." In 1824, the officials for tattooing swarmed all over the plateau of Khorat: Khoukhan, Yasothon, Souvannaphoum, Kalasin. As B.J. Terwiel pointed out in general terms about this tattooing politics: "it has bearing upon the system of administration as well as the class structure and class friction".²³ This "red iron policy" had never reached such a scale under the previous reign and was proof of the failure of the pacification and consolidation efforts undertaken since the aggression against the Muong Lao in 1778 by the armies of Taksin. The aggression was intended to replace the former local elite by a new counter-elite, direct descendents of the family of Phra Voraphita²⁴ whom the Thai historians called Phra Vo and Phra Ta, and aimed at "destabilising the left side of the Mekong river from the right side".²⁵

Soon after his accession to power, Rama III appointed his chief of protocol and chief of tattooing — the most important noble positions that he filled in 1824.²⁶ These were strategic posts for the implementation of the Thai scheme to annex the whole of Laos and for the demolition of the structure of Lao political organizations. This policy was revealed in a remarkable statistical document. On 20 January 1827 an English arms trader, E. Malloch obtained from a Siamese government official a secret document taken from the Public Records; it listed the names of provinces, principalities, cities, towns and villages of Siam with the population of each classified as Siamese, Chinese, Peguers, Cambojeans, Tavoyans, Cochinchinese, Laos, Malays, Moors and Christians.²⁷ In this document, for the cities which were specifically Lao, such as Vientiane, Louang Prabang, Champassak ("Pasuk" in Malloch's document), all inhabitants were listed as "Siamese", with the category "Laos" an eloquent "Zero".

²²Charles Archaimbault, "Les Annales de l'ancien Royaume de S'ienng Khwang", *Bulletin de l'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient* (1967): 580.

²³Baas Terwiel, "Tattooing in Thailand's History", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (London, 1979): 158.

²⁴Phra Phothignanvisay, *Nangseu Leuang Phra Ta Phra Vo* (Chronicle about Phra Ta and Phra Vo) (Nongboulamphou, 1959), 81pp.

²⁵Pansa Sinsawat, idem, p. 44. Kennon Breazeale, idem, pp. 78–79; Thawatt Poonothok (1980), idem, p. 14.

²⁶Walter Vella, *Siam under Rama III* (New York: J.J. Augustin Inc., 1957), p. 6.

²⁷*The Burney Papers* (Bangkok: Vajirana National Library, 1910–14), Vol. III, part 2, p. 385. For an academic use of these data, cf. Ronald R. Renard, "The role of the Karens in Thai society", in *Royalty and Commoners: Essays in Thai administrative, economic and social history, Contributions to Asian Studies*, 1980, vol. 15, p. 20.

POPULATION

Names of Provinces, Cities, Towns, etc.	Siamese	Chinese	Laos	Cochin-Cambojeans		
				Chinese	Malays	Pequers
Muang Vieng Chan	150,000	2,000	—	—	—	—
Muang Luang	7,500	450	—	—	—	—
Muang Luang Prabang	14,500	450	—	—	—	—
Muang Chieng Mai	75,000	900	—	—	—	—

In the face of such threats, the Lao could not but rise up to save their identity, their nationality, and to recover their liberty lost in 1778. They faced losing everything by the total “siamicisation”, the “provincialisation” of Muong Lao enacted in 1824 by the general tattooing policy. Contrary to the title of a work published by the Department of Fine Arts (Bangkok), the insurrection that followed was an “insurrection of the Lao”, not the “revolt of Chao Anou”.²⁸ James Low, an expert on Siam of that period²⁹ wrote in a report dated 15 August 1826, that Siam was systematically pursuing a policy “of aggrandizement”³⁰; “while the Burman sway over its neighbour is suspended, Siam has the leisure to strengthen and improve her resources.... She may not then find it convenient to extend herself west, but the Malacca Peninsula lies before her, an easy prey.... Siam will likely also turn her attention to Camboja and Laos, which cannot be supposed capable of resisting her long”.³¹ In a document of October 1826, James Low also stated that “Her neighbours too on the north, the Laos of Che-ung Mai and Lan Chang, are ever ready to assert independence.”³² In fact, Chao Anou had expressed at the very least since 1805 his quest for independence when he sent an

²⁸Department of Fine Arts, *Chotmaihei Ruang Prap Khabot Vientiane* (Documents concerning the suppression of the revolt of Vientiane) (Bangkok: Sophon, 1926), 84pp.

²⁹James Low, “On the Government of Siam”, *Asiatic Researches* (Calcutta, 1839). On the appreciation of his superiors for his work, see *The Burney Papers*, vol. I, part 4, p. 579.

³⁰*The Burney Papers*, vol. II, part 4, pp. 53, 135.

³¹*The Burney Papers*, vol. II, part 4, p. 9.

³²*The Burney Papers*, vol. V, part I, p. 89. On his part, Francis Garnier wrote, “in 1826, the princes of Vienchang tried again to proclaim the independence of Laos, but the repression was rapid and terrible: the king of Vienchang was defeated, betrayed by the Annamities in whose country king Anou was seeking asylum, and died imprisoned in Bangkok” (p. 54). “Xiang Mai warmly solicited by king Anou to join him to reconquer the independence of the Lao race....” (p. 388); Francis Garnier, “Voyage d’exploration en Indo-Chine”, *Revue Tour du Monde* (Paris, 1870–71). Based on these remarks it is clear that these authors did not disagree at all with what Anou told his collaborators as reported by Chao Phraya Thiphakarawong: “The situation became more than intolerable, we must not accept at all to continue to be a dependency (of Siam)” (p. 39). Cf. Chao Phraya Thiphakarawong, the *Royal Chronicle of the Third Reign of the Bangkok Dynasty*, p. 39. Furthermore, a Thai historian linked with the dynasty of the Vientiane Kingdom, Phraya Pramouanvisaphoum also wrote, “Phra Chao Anouroutharaj, Phra Chao Lane Xang Hom Khao Anou or Chao Anouvong, considering that Muong Lane Xang had in the past always been an independent country ... but was then defeated by the armies of Krung Thonburi, and abducted as a vassal of Krungthep and at the same time lost the

embassy to Gia Long who opposed him a *fin de non-recevoir*. In November 1826, Minh Mang, Gia Long's successor, even sent an emissary to Anou forbidding him to break from Bangkok's domination and creating troubles for Siam.³³ Henry Burney, sent to sign an

emerald Buddha, palladium of the country, decided to launch a national liberation war...." Phraya Pramouanvisaphoum, *Phongsavadane Muong Lane Xang*, Bangkok, 25 February 1484 (L 939) 2 ed, p. 43.

³³On this independent spirit of Anou as he approached Emperor Gia Long in 1805 on the occasion of the first Embassy which Anou sent to the Court of Hue after being crowned, see Paul Le Boulanger, *Histoire de Laos Francais: Essai d'une etude chronologique des principautes Laotiennes* (Paris: Plon, 1932), p. 104. See also Nguyen Le Thi (ed.), *Compilation of ancient Vietnamese texts on Laos* (in Vietnamese), Department of Southeast Asian Studies, Social Sciences Committee of Vietnam (Hanoi, 1977), p. 132. The *fin de non recevoir* opposed by Gia Long to Anou is certainly motivated by the fact that the relations between Hue and Bangkok were in the nature of a *bonne entente*. Rama V (1868–1910) commented on events of this period as follows: "Even if problems exist in Cambodia these are for the two countries to negotiate. But the friendship and the cordial relations (between the two countries) remain without any trouble." Cf. Princess Narinthonethewi, *Chotmai het kwam song cham khong krommalnang Narinthonethewi ... lae phraratchawichan nai Phrabat Somdet Phra Chulachomklao chaoyuho* (Recollections) (Bangkok: Khuru Sapha, 1963), p. 237. Furthermore, Gia Long was politically considered as the "son in law" of Rama I. On this point, see Pansa Sinsawat, *idem*, p. 32; and Lorraine Marie Gesick: "Kingship and political integration in traditional Siam, 1767–1824" (Ph.D. thesis, Cornell University, 1976), p. 124. The successor of Gia Long, Minh Mang later sent an embassy composed of 4 nobles with a retinue of 30 persons to Anou on November 1826 to forbid him to cause any troubles for Bangkok and to continue to accept being a vassal of Bangkok. The Thai document on Minh Mang's embassy to Anou is preserved at the Thai National Library (Manuscripts Division): Document Rama III (19) 1189/4, Phraya Phetphichai to Phraya Sisahathep, 17 April 1827. The refusal of the court of Hue to help Anou in any way followed the categorical rejection of a Burmese proposal for an offensive alliance against Bangkok. On this matter, see Sri Krishna Saxena, "Causes leading to the deputation of a Burmese political mission to the court of Cochin-China (1822–1824) and its results", *Bulletin de L'Ecole Francaise D'Extreme Orient* (1952), pp. 574–79; Suzanne Karpeles, "Notules sur un manuscrit relatif a une ambassade Birmane en Cochin-Chine", *Bulletin de la Societe D'Etudes Indochinoises* (1949): pp. 37–45. The relations between the Court of Hue and the Court of Bangkok began to deteriorate seriously after the massacre of a Vietnamese embassy by the Thai army at Nakhon Phanom at the end of 1828. This embassy was to convey a message of Minh Mang asking Anou to surrender to the Siamese and to recognize Thai domination on Laos. Contemporaries of the period predicted accurately that this slaughter was the beginning of the end of the Bangkok-Hue axis. Thus, General Bodinthondecha wrote in his memoirs of the war, "the Thai officers had certainly committed faults contrary to orders. Undoubtedly serious conflicts would erupt in the near future with the Vietnamese. In spite of the fact that orders were violated, one cannot draw back, and we must prepare ourselves to cope with the consequences which will come without fail". See K.S.R. Kulab, *Anam Sayam yut* (Annam and Siam at war), vol. 7 (Bangkok, Pra Phithaya, 1981), p. 395. Chao Phraya Thipakarawong later wrote in his chronicle of the Third Reign: "Thai officers have killed Vietnamese (diplomats) against orders" (p. 89). Rama V judged the action as follows: "this action constituted a major fact leading to the decline of the friendship between Siam and Vietnam", "Sermon honoring Rama III", *Prachum Phongsawadan* (Bangkok, 1965), vol. 8, part 33, p. 354. The missionary Charles Gutzlaff commented on this massacre with these words, "The envoy was treacherously murdered by the Siamese, together with his whole retinue, consisting of one hundred men.... Enraged at such a breach of the law of nations, but feeling themselves too weak, the Cochin-Chinese then sent an ambassador to Bangkok.... Nothing could be more conciliatory than the letter addressed on the occasion to the king of Siam...." Charles Gutzlaff, *Journal of the three voyages along the coast of China in 1831, 1832, 1833 with notices on Siam* (London: Westly and Davis, 1834), p. 77; Walter F. Vella concluded in a more general sense, "the British defeat of Burma in 1825–1826 had removed the military threat to the Siamese from the West and freed Siamese forces for action elsewhere. The campaigns against Wiangchan had turned the attentions of the Siamese to the East, and the defeat of Wiangchan in 1828 had encouraged the Siamese to continue their expansion in that direction. The fact that the Vietnamese had not defended their claims in Eastern Laos

agreement with the court of Bangkok wrote “It is very probable that the Siamese will lose all their influence over the Lao Province, and if these join together, they will be able to annoy the Siamese very much.”³⁴

The tattooing had caused large-scale population movements which Chao Anou mentioned directly in his letter of 17 January 1827 to Rama III.³⁵ Anou’s first response was to give an order to his army deployed over the plateau of Khorat to repatriate all the Lao population and to eliminate all the tattooing officials.³⁶

The political and territorial swallowing of Laos by the process of tattooing was preceded by measures aimed at smashing the prestige of the dynasty of Vientiane, and the upgrading of Xieng Mai and Louang Prabang. Chao Ratsavong of Vientiane, heir to the throne of Vientiane was ordered to lead the Lao in performing heavy labour: cutting down sugar palm trees of Souphanburi and trailing it to Samut Prakarn; cutting down 5000 bamboo trees to fill the mouth of the Chaophraya River against an eventual British attack. This was confirmed in 1825 by the Burney Papers. It was harsh and humiliating labour, as Toem Viphakhotchanakit recognized, and he also acknowledged that the will to assert independence was at the root of the 1827 Lao insurrection.³⁷

Chao Anou himself was not spared these affronts, as was revealed in the passage of a letter in late 1828 from the Court of Hue to the Court of Bangkok, reproduced by General Bodinthondecha in his Memoir of the war. “Chao Anou had opened hostilities against the Thai because during his visit to the king (in Bangkok), several great Thai lords, by their words and their behaviour, had boundlessly insulted Chao Anou. And the princes, brothers of the king of Siam but of different mothers, had plotted to humiliate and to exploit Chao Anou for the simple reason that he was Lao. Chao Anou who, for his part, considered himself a true offspring of the Lao king was therefore hurt by these personages whose nobility and age had no match with his own. Chao Anou, so mistreated, returned to Vientiane.”³⁸

Charles Gutzlaff, an American missionary then newly arrived in Bangkok, confirmed this: “... The Siamese used every strategy to oppress the subjects of one of the Laos tributary chiefs, Chow-Vin-Chan. This prince, who was formerly so high in favour with the late king of Siam (i.e., Rama II) as to be received, at his last visit, in a gilded boat, and to be carried in a gilded sedan chair....”³⁹ Chao Anou, however, was to leave

against Siamese military opposition also undoubtedly led the Siamese to hope that the Annamese would yield in Cambodia as well.” Walter F. Vella, *Siam under Rama III*, p. 96.

³⁴*The Burney Papers*, vol. III, part 1, p. 99.

³⁵This letter has been published by the Thai National Library as *A collection of accounts and documents concerning Nakhone Rajasima* (Bangkok: Prachakwithaya, 1968), pp. 27–29. On the link between tattooing and troubles in the region of Kalasin, cf. Theerachai Boonmathum, “A local history of Huamuang Kalasin, 1793–1907” (M.A. thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1984), 267p. In Thai.

³⁶Thawatt Poonothok (1982), p. 31.

³⁷Toem Wiphakphothchanakit, *A History of North-east Thailand* (Bangkok: Social Science Association Press, 1970), in Thai, pp. 355–57. The British had also noted the Lao presence in the harsh labour at the mouth of the Chaophraya river, principally to construct defense work at the sea. Foreigners called this construction “The Lao fort”. Cf. *The Burney Papers*, vol. I, part I, p. 31.

³⁸K.S.R. Kyalab, *Anam Sayam yut*, vol. II, p. 750. Furthermore, Chao Anou was an offspring of a 2,000 year-old dynasty, cf. Kamphol Srichak, “Oubatorommachak Lao” (Birth of the Lao nation) (Bangkok: Syamvitthagnakan, 1879), p. 46.

³⁹Charles Gutzlaff, *idem*, p. 76. For a modern ethnological analysis of this incident, see M.J.P. Barber, “Migrants and Modernization: A study of change in Lao society” (Ph.D. thesis, University of Hull, 1979), p. 297; see also pp. 44, 45, 101, 102.

Bangkok without paying the usual courtesy visits. According to the version of Chao Ratsavong Thenkomeun Charatsphonpatithane: “perched on his elephant”, Ratsavong shouted in Lao to the peasants who were there: “In Muong Thai we have no rice to eat nor fish bones to nibble. By going back to Muong Lane-Xang we will have perfumed rice and delicious fish.” Arriving back in Vientiane, he pressed Chao Anou: “I do not want to be slave to the Thai anymore. Radical measures must be taken to put an end to this situation. What do you think about it, father?”⁴⁰ The *Phongsavadane* of Vientiane stressed this influence of Ratsavong on Anou. Soon the situation became such that there was an actual break between Bangkok and Vientiane. Thus, Ratsavong inverted the Thai proverb which said “go to Thai (Siam) and one can eat fish, return to Laos — one eats rice”. The anti-thesis of this is evident in a Lao-khene⁴¹ song usually called *Lao phene*. In this most famous song a Lao prisoner of the 1827 war in Siam describes his fall to hell in Bangkok and the injustice and misfortunes he suffered under those he called “Thai-friend”, his masters.⁴²

The Chotheet Yo Muong Vientiane (the copy of Vat Phra Keo) remarks that in the “year Sakalat 1173, year of the Horse, tenth month, ninth day at the crescent of the moon, Chao Anou sent a trade mission to Moung Leu to buy horses and elephants”. This was the first indication of trade with China in a Lao Chronicle. Did Anou sense the blockade that Siam was to set up the following year to cut Laos off from its traditional channels via Cambodia and to disrupt Lao production?⁴³ “Almost all the most valuable exports of Siam: benzoin, cotton, teack, copper, peltry, stick-lac, lead, etc. are the products of Laos,” wrote Henry Burney in 1826.⁴⁴ Furthermore, “The People of Laos pay their tribute in Stick-lac, Ivory, Benzoin and other articles.”⁴⁵

From an economic point of view, the conflict of 1827 was also a follow up to the trade war initiated in 1810 by the governor of Khorat and directed against the Lao and against Anou. “Campaign against Lao (Khorat), seizure of Strung Teng” were laconically mentioned by P. Schweisguth in his work entitled *A Century of History in the Indochina Peninsula*.⁴⁶ D.G.E. Hall explained it thus:

... in that year (1812) Rama II (1809–24) intervened (in Cambodia) in support of a rebel brother of then King Ang Chan, who fled to Saigon. A strong Vietnamese force reinstated him in the following year, and the Siamese prudently withdrew their candidate, who lived out the rest of his days at Bangkok. A Vietnamese garrison took over the citadel at Phnom Penh, and for the time being Siamese influence there was in a state of eclipse. But the Bangkok government remained ever on the alert for

⁴⁰S. Playnoy, *Saranoukom Prawatsat Thai* (Dictionary of Thai history) (Bangkok: Houasasom, 1984), pp. 246–47.

⁴¹Phasit Chitphasa, “Phatchananoukom chababnirutisat”, *Sinlapa Wathanatham* (Bangkok, Nov. 1982), p. 61. “*Lao phen*” is in fact a “shifted” word from the original “*Lao Khene*”. *Khene* is a Lao organ, a popular folk musical instrument, and the Lao prisoners of war would have had it with them, no matter the adversity. Phounphat Amatyakun, “*Lao phen*”, *Sinlapa Wathanatham*, August 1983, pp. 19–20, reproduces a long chant sung by the 1827 prisoners of war.

⁴²Prani Wongthep, *Pheun Ban Pheun Muang* (Folk Traditions) (Bangkok: Samnakphim Chaophraya, 1982), p. 187.

⁴³On the Cambodian outlet, see P. Gabriel de San Antonio, *Breve et veridique relation des evenements du Cambodge*, written in 1603, edited by A. Cabaton (Paris: Leroux, 1914), p. For. 78, I. Cf. also P.B. Groslier, *Angkor et le Cambodge au XVIIe...* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958), p. 162.

⁴⁴*The Burney Papers*, vol. II, part 4, p. 83.

⁴⁵*The Burney Papers*, vol. II, part 5, p. 136.

⁴⁶P. Schweisguth, *Un siecle d'histoire dans la peninsule Indochinese* (Paris, 1944).

an opportunity to regain control. Meanwhile it compensated itself by sending an army in 1814 to Khorat which proceeded to occupy all the territory between the frontier of Phromp-Tep and the Dangrek mountains, and in addition the provinces of Mlou-Prey and Tonle-Repou, which were too far distant from Udong to be effectively under the control of the central government. There was no opposition, and the Siamese army then proceeded to cross the Mekong and occupy Stung Treng. By this operation, Siam gained possession of a thick slice of territory in the north of Cambodia and drove a wedge between that kingdom and the kingdom of Vientiane, which a few years later it was to absorb.⁴⁷

“Bodin had been personally involved in the interior trade from the Lao and Khmer states that had helped enrich the elite of Bangkok before mid-century.”⁴⁸ The Lao spared no efforts in their attempts to counter this blockade and the bleeding slavery begun in 1791 by the governor of Khorat and Bangkok against the Lao, particularly the Lao Theung.⁴⁹

According to Crawford, the prodigious increase in the price of slaves in Bangkok (which increased three-fold) incited a rush for slaves. The main instigator of this rush was the governor of Khorat who did not hesitate to discreetly manipulate a revolt in order to better devote himself to this lucrative activity. In 1819 “the Siamese reduced the minority peoples, who in those areas had once numbered some 300,000, to only a few thousand in a terrible massacre. The peoples’ legends still recalled the rice fields running with blood, streams choked and valleys piled with corpses.”⁵⁰ The war against Laos in 1827 and the systematic depopulation of the left side of the Mekong river was to provide servile labour for a new phase of the development of Bangkok.⁵¹ “War, probably the principal occupation of the state, provided the resources of the state, and contributed to the reproduction of both the slave population and the political system.”⁵² And “it is easy to conquer 2 or 3 Vientianes” said the Commander-in-chief, the Front Palace Prince.⁵³ This was because Bangkok was devoted to an escalated arms race.⁵⁴

⁴⁷D.G.E. Hall, *A History of Southeast Asia*, pp. 465–66. Also Francis Garnier, *idem*, p. 51.

⁴⁸Snit Smuckarn and Kennon Breazeale, “The Phuan, A culture in search of survival” (manuscript version), p. 59.

⁴⁹Mom Amoravongvichit, *Phongsawadan Huamouang Monthon Isarn, Prachum Phongsawadan*, vol. 4 (Bangkok: Khuru Sapha, 1963), pp. 214–15. Chatthip Nartsupha, “The ideology of holy men revolts in North East Thailand”, *History and Peasant Consciousness in Southeast Asia*, ed. A. Turton and S. Tanabe (Kyoto: Senri Ethnological Studies, National Museum of Ethnology, 1984), p. 114.

⁵⁰Chatthip Nartsupha, *idem*, p. 115. Also Wuthichai Mulasip, “*Kabot Ai Sakietgong, Wikhro chak ekkasan Pheun Vieng*” (the Sakietgong revolt: Analysis based on the Pheun Vieng chronicle) in Wuthichai Mulasip and Thammanit Waraphon (eds.), *Kabot Phrai* (Peasant Revolts) (Bangkok: Bangkok, Social Science Association, 1982), pp. 45–52.

⁵¹More generally on this item, Hong Lysa, *Thailand in the Nineteenth Century, Evolution of the Economy and Society* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1984), 182 pp.

⁵²Andrew Turton, “Thai institutions of slavery”, in *Asian and African systems of slavery*, ed. James L. Watson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 279. Slave manpower is pivotal of the Siamese social and economical system in the 1820s. Cf. *The Crawford Papers* (translated by Henri Berland) *Bulletin De La Societe D’Etudes Indochinoises* (1941), pp. 69, 71, 75.

⁵³Chao Phraya Thiphakarawong, *idem*, p. 63.

⁵⁴One can read in the Burney Papers that in 1826 “Ordonnance Pun Yai in great demand and old cannon brings a price far beyond its value. Musket, Pun Khap Sila are now not in such great demand as they were 2 or 3 years ago.” *The Burney Papers*, vol. III, part 4, p. 101. On the arms race by Siam at this period, see Pierre Fistie, *L’evolution de la Thaïlande contemporaine* (Paris: A. Colin, 1967), p. 51; Virginia Thompson, *Thailand the New Siam* (New York: Paragon, 1967), p. 31.

When the Lao took measures of self-defence against the schemes of Khorat⁵⁵ and proclaimed their independence, Bangkok used it as a pretext to enact a general mobilization and to wage war. After a thrust on Khorat, citadel of Bangkok's expansionism over the two banks of the Mekhong river, Chao Anou returned to Vientiane on the back of his elephant, "hat striped with red on his head", said a witness.⁵⁶ Foreseeing the Thai reaction, he organized in advance an entrenched camp at Nong Boua Lamphou to protect the retreat of his army and the repatriation of the Lao.⁵⁷ "The population of Saraburi returned to Vientiane crying for joy; those of Khorat with happiness", said a witness.⁵⁸ Several battles were fought during this retreat.⁵⁹ Xieng Khouang rallied to help Chao Anou.⁶⁰ Louang Prabang, contacted by Chao Anou in 1820 and 1821 to

free the country from Thai domination, that the liberated country will be reunified under one king, the king of Luang Prabang, and that Chao Anou will retire like Chao Fa Ngoum to monastery,

brought food and men to Paklay as Chao Anou had requested.⁶¹ The leader of Xieng Mai was in Raheng as Anou wanted a military diversion.⁶² Chao Anou and Chao

⁵⁵All the Lao chronicles say that Chao Anou had aimed at Khorat and not Bangkok. In the memoirs of war of Bodin, there was no mention of preparations by the Lao to invade Bangkok. We must take note of the character of the Governor of Khorat, whose megalomania had furiously hampered the Lao as was reported by Gutzlaff, *idem*, p. 76. Francis Garnier also confirmed this, *idem*, p. 388. See also the Vietnamese Annals, cf. Nguyen Le Thi, *idem*, p. 134. The history "*Pheun Vieng*" also abounds with such reference. See studies of Thawatt Poonothok. The governor of this out-post for the expansionist policy of Bangkok on the Lao country and on the highlands of Khorat, was a bastard of Taksin, brother-in-law of Bodin and father-in-law of Rama III. He was the highest provincial civil servant of Siam at this period. Cf. Department of Fine Arts, *Chotmaihei khong Nakhon Rajasima* (Documents concerning Nakhon Rajasima), 4th ed. (Bangkok, 1985), pp. 55–72 and 283–313.

⁵⁶Department of Fine Arts, *Documents concerning the suppression of the Vientiane revolt*, p. 60.

⁵⁷As he entered Khorat and before the eruption of armed confrontation between the avant-gard of the Bangkok army and the Lao at Thong Samrit, Anou and the Lao had sent Lao from Khorat and from other villages in the Khorat Plateau to Nong Boua Lamphou and the Thai from Khorat or from other towns directly to Vientiane, cf. Department of Fine Arts, *idem*, p. 22.

⁵⁸Department of Fine Arts, *Documents concerning the suppression of the revolt of Vientiane....*, p. 23. Thiphakarawong, *idem*, p. 46.

⁵⁹In their report sent to Bangkok, the Thai officials did not mention any name of any woman, cf. Thai National Library (ed.), *A collection of accounts and documents concerning Nakhon Ratchasima*, pp. 29–34. Also, Thawatt Poonothok (1980), pp. 87–90, 158–63. However, Thai modern history stress that the victory on the Lao is due to a Thai woman: Khun Ying Mo.

⁶⁰Bibliothèque Nationale Lao (ed.), *Phongsavadane Muong Phouan* (chronicle of Xieng Khouang) (Vientiane, 1969), pp. 15–18. On the help rendered by Chao Noi of Xieng Khouang, see the confirmation by the Vietnamese Annals, cf. Ngo Cao Lang, *Chronicle on our royal court's behaviour towards the affairs of the country of ten thousand elephants*. Translated and ed. by Department of Southeast Asian Studies, Social Science Committee of Vietnam (Hanoi, 1977), p. 28.

⁶¹On the Anou embassies, cf. Chao Khammanh Vongkotratana, *Phongsavadane Sat Lao* (History of the Lao nation), Bibliothèque Nationale Lao, 1973, p. 65. Anou's letter was preserved "preciously" by his addressee, King Manthathourat of Luang Prabang, at the royal pagoda, the Vat Mai. On the request of Anou in 1827, see Thai National Library (Manuscripts Division), "document Rama III (119) 1189/4". Phraya Phetphichai to Phraya Sisahathep, 17 April 1827.

⁶²Thai National Library (Manuscripts Division), "Document Rama III (18) 1189/4, memo 13, June 1827. Despatch from Phraya Phetphichai, 23 May 1827: Phetphichai learnt that Phraya Nan had sent Saen Louang Thipsomsak to see Ai Phraya Souriyawongsa at Lomsak. Anou was exhorting the governors of Nan and Phrae to take their armies and attack towards Phichai, and that of Lampang and Xieng Mai and Lamphun to attack via Tak, meeting the Nan-Phrae armies at Chainat...."

Ratsavong led the army until the last phase, the decisive battles in the national redoubt of Thong Sompoy and Khao Sarn.⁶³ The stories of “Pheun vieng” told that after the sacking of Vientiane by Bodin, Chao Ratsavong continued the fight against him all the way to Cambodia.⁶⁴

Apart from official Court chronicles cited above, another living oral tradition also glorified Chao Anou and particularly Chao Ratsavong from generation to generation. The name of Chao Ratsavong personified in the collective memory of the inhabitants of the two shores of the Mekhong River of the Lao nation, the combativeness and the indomitable resistant spirit of the Lao, the confidence of a resurrection of the fatherland for a better future. The inhabitants of Park-Hinboun near the Thakek region have dedicated a voluminous book to him entitled: “Thao Lao-Kham: Chronicle of Ratsavong”.⁶⁵ The chronicle of Yasothon gave to Ratsavong all the battles waged from 1827 to 1828.⁶⁶ The descendants of the people deported from Xieng Khouang to Siam, even today, sing praises of Ratsavong and of their attachment to Laos while singing lullabies to their babies.⁶⁷ It is significant that generally the inhabitants of the North-East of present day Thailand as well as those of Louang Prabang sing the same refrains.⁶⁸ The Phou Thai,

⁶³Department of Fine Arts, *Documents concerning the suppression of Vientiane revolt*, p. 55. More generally for a reconstitution of the military operation of this 1827 campaign, see Victor Kennedy, “An indigenous Early Nineteenth century map of Central and Northeast Thailand”, in Tej Bunnag and Michael Smithies (eds.), *In memoriam Phraya Anuman Rajadhon* (Bangkok: The Siam Society, 1970), pp. 315–48. On the circumstances leading to Chao Anou’s departure from Vientiane, see the accounts of the wife of the Governor of Khorat: “On 23 May 1827 the Rong Phaen of Saraburi and the Samian Tra of Khorat brought the wives of Chaophraya Khorat and 3 children fleeing from Vientiane. They said Anou knew that the Bangkok armies had defeated the Zankhao Sarn post. But the Lao army had not withdrawn into Vientiane, so he could not reorganise them for defence. So he and his family fled by boat on 22nd May....” Thai National Library (manuscripts Division), “Document Rama III (36) 1189/10 Kai; despatch 28 May 1827”. In fact, Lao armies, were encircled and struck down by the fire power of the Siamese armies as revealed by the Memoirs of war by Bodin. The chronicle of Nan said: “When news of the coming of the massive armies to Vientiane reached him, Chao Anou and the people deserted the city....”, *The Nan Chronicle*, trans. Prasoet Churatana, ed. David K. Wyatt, Data Paper (Cornell, 1966), p. 69.

⁶⁴Thawatt Poonothok (1980), p. 55.

⁶⁵This popular chronicle is sung in the monasteries and in homes during evening entertainment at religious festivals and marriages. In 1942, Chane Khene, a former monk from the Paksane region, married to a woman of the plateau of Khorat, wrote a popular and oral chronicle in 8 big sets of palm leaves. His manuscript is published by the National Lao Library (ed.): *Thai Lao Kham. Chao Ratsavong*, ed. Maha Kikeo Oudomsomphou (Vientiane, 1973), 237p. See also Phaa Achan Yanna Sourignavong, *Lam Pheun Muong Vientiane* (Pheun Muong Vientiane poems, 1985), Vat Mixay (Vientiane, Lao P.D.R.).

⁶⁶*Phongsawadan Muang Yasothon* (chronicle of Muang Yasothon), in Prachum Phongsawadan, Vol. 44, Part 70 (Bangkok: Khuru Sapha, 1969), pp. 74–77.

⁶⁷Prani Vongthep, “*Pheun Ban Pheun Muang*” (Folk traditions), pp. 178–87. For Maha Vankham Sourignadet, these “chants of Chao Ratsavong” were the work of General Lao Phagna Xiengsa, one of the Chao Anou’s best officers. The manuscript on Ratsavong is called “Kab Phagna Xiengsa” (Poems of Phagna Xiengsa) dated 10–1–1944, at Vat Nong Nam Chanh, Champone in the south Laos.

⁶⁸“Testimony of Aunt Khamsouk Vongvichit collected 20 years ago by Somsis S. Desa” (Our interview with Somsis S. Desa in Vientiane on 15 August 1986.) This testimony is confirmed by another author, Maha Sila Viravong, who reported that in his youth, in the region of Khonken he sang the same refrains on the powress of Chao Ratsavong (Our interview with Maha Sila Viravong in Vientiane on the 11 July 1978.) Other versions are also found in Lao provinces as reported by Chaelun Phoungchan in “*Phane pavatsat Lao*” (Assessment of Lao history), Typewritten manuscript, Volume 3, pp. 21–23. See also Somsis S. Desa, “Kang Kheun ko henh....”

almost the last arrivals in Lao territory, after the deportation to the right bank of the Mekhong River, choose to call their new settlement “Muong Phou Lane Xang”.⁶⁹ Thus, a deep undercurrent unites the different ethnic groups who make up the diversity and the wealth of the Lao people, and make them share in the same identity. Lane Xang is personified by Ratsavong, and to some extent by Anou. A quasi-mystical attachment of the Lao to their native land has been strengthened by the fusion of events in this period. “The fruit won’t fall far away from the tree”, says a Lao maxim.⁷⁰ In battles they were struck down together with their generals, the Lao recruits of Vientiane, of Loei, Roi Et, Khone Ken, Yasothon as well as Sakon-Nakhone, Saraburi or Mahasay, Xien Khuang, “defending their country with ruthlessness because they cherish it”, the Siamese commander-in-chief, the Front Palace Prince, wrote in his report to king Rama III.⁷¹ “The country of the free Lao” the American missionary, Charles Gutzlaff, called his conference dedicated to Laos in 1848 at the Royal Geographical Society in London.⁷² For,

... since the XVIII century, the feudal system declined, our divided country was invaded and dominated by the feudal Siamese. But our people strengthened their unity and never stopped fighting with courage. The most splendid struggle was the uprising of the whole country under the leadership of our national hero Tiao Anouvong (1827–1828). While not victorious, the insurrection has however written glorious pages in our national defence and its heroic and indomitable spirit transmitted to this day among the people.⁷³

It is symbolic that in 1985, while the Lao people, with Kaysone Phomvihane as the Secretary-General, who in 1949, formed the “Ratsavong” fighting unit, celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the Lao ruling party, the Thai re-enacted an episode of the 19th-century war at Khorat in the presence of its Prime Minister.

We Lao researchers are only beginning our recovery of the historical truth behind the 1827–29 war. This paper is about the first recent attempt by Lao nationals to study the war using documented materials, and not carry any official line. Some Government officials do not accept its interpretation. For the current vice-Minister of Culture, the Siamese invasion of Laos in 1827 was master-minded and supported by the British, and Chao Anou was going to Bangkok to help Rama III against the expansion of capitalism.⁷⁴ Other Lao have difficulty questioning the traditional analysis, which is that

⁶⁹Charubut Reuangsuwan “Kham Phien” (“shifted” words), *Sinlapa Watthanatham*, Bangkok, June 1983, p. 53.

⁷⁰An article dealing with Lao patriotism in history has been published under this title by Mayoury. “Mak Mai bo hone lon kai kok” (“The fruit won’t fall far away from the tree”), *Pasason* (Daily of the Central Committee of the Lao Revolutionary People’s Party), 8 June 1987, no. 3634.

⁷¹In K.S.R. Kulab: “Anam Sayam yut”, p. 282.

⁷²Dr Gutzlaff, “The country of the free Laos”, *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* (London, 1849), pp. 33–41.

⁷³Kaysone Phomvihane, “La Revolution Lao” (Moscow: Editions du Progress, 1980), p. 9. On the “Ratsavong Unit”, cf. Sisana and Vongsay, “Telling about the Revolutionary Traditions” (in Lao). Lao Hak Sat (ed.), 1970, pp. 21–29.

⁷⁴Somsri Desa. “Kang khuen ko henh, kang venh houng” (“See in the night and day”) (n.d.); “konelam Pravatsat” (Poem on Lao history) (Vientiane, 1977); “Lao douang deuane” (Lao song on the shining moon) (Vientiane, State Press of the Lao PDR., 1981).

In fact, in his letter to the Siamese king Rama III, Chao Anou had made an unambiguous reference to the help requested by Rama III (cf. *Ruam Ruang Muang Nakhon Rajasima*) (Collected documents on Khorat) (Bangkok: Phrachakwitthaya, 1968, p. 27). And in the account of F.A. Neale,

of Maha Sila Viravong, a nationalist, born in Northeast Thailand, and one of the founders of the Lao Issara Movement against the French in 1945, who paradoxically “indigenized” Chaophraya Thiprakarawong’s account.⁷⁵ For generations, “Lao history” meant the Maha Sila Viravong books.⁷⁶ His accounts accept the orthodox Thai version that Chao Anou entered into rebellion because he had been rebuffed in his attempts to obtain the return of some Lao dancers and other Lao to their country. Chao Anou is celebrated as a hero for rising against the domination of Bangkok. He was seen as having been “victimized” by the Thai, a situation which Maha Sila Viravong and other writers of his generation also saw themselves in.

From “independence” granted by France in 1949 to 1975, less than 5 books have been published in Laos on Lao history. These include those of Maha Sila Viravong, and the thin primary school book, “History of Laos”, authored by Souphanh Blanchard de la

it seems that some Englishmen were in the Thai army: “In this crisis, Mr Hunter bethought him of turning to some use the guns that were rusting on board the vessels of war...., several of the guns were transhipped into smaller craft, and, with ample supply of ammunition, and under the direction of a few Englishmen and Siamese, the expedition, composed of nearly twelve thousand men, sailed up.... Here, under the superintendence of Messrs. H_____r and M_____n (the latter in the Siamese service) serviceable batteries were soon constructed, the cannon well and firmly mounted.... (The frightened inhabitants of the village) would have fled instantly, had not the English and Manillamen, aided by a few staunch Malaya Lascars....” F.A. Neale, *Narrative of a residence in Siam* (London, National Illustrated Library, 1852, pp. 48–51). It is worth noting also that a report from the general headquarters of the Commander in chief Bovorn camping nearby Vientiane after the defeat of Chao Anou, mentioned the receipt of a letter in English (cf. Thai National Library. Document Rama III (86) 1189/11 ching) (Chasenyakone-Phraya Sihathep, 25 June 1827).

The thinking that some collusion had existed between the Thai and the English is a deep-rooted one among some Lao. For instance, some Lao historians, during the royalist regime, maintained that the Thai commander Bodin is an English, cf. Khamchanh Pradith: “Pawatsat Kane Thout Lao” (History of the Lao Diplomacy), Vientiane Pakpassak, ed. (1971), p. 17 and Prasit Phommakak: “Kho Hay Lao Chong Chafern” (For a progressive Laos), Vientiane Pakpassak, ed. (1974), p. 34.

⁷⁵Maha Sila Viravong: “Lao History” edited in 1957 (301 pages). In an interview with him on 12 October 1979, Maha Sila Viravong told us that the first draft of his “Lao history” was finished in 1945, but with the fleeing of the Lao Issara to Thailand and the coming back of the French Army, this draft had been kept in safekeeping with Oukham Phomvongsa, who edited it under the title “The past of the Lao country” in 1955. The Sila Viravong Lao history has been subsequently re-issued many times in Laos as a textbook and translated into English, edited by the Paragon Press (New York, 1958), “... A traditional Lao viewpoint”, J.M. Halpern called it, and went on: “Interestingly, Europeans are not mentioned in this account which ends at the beginning of the period of French colonization” [J.M. Halpern, *Government, Politics, and social structure in Laos. A Study of Tradition and Innovation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), p. 97]. See also the comment by Charles Archambault in “Les annales de l’ancien royaume de S’ieng Kwang”, *Bulletin de L’Ecole Francise D’Extreme Orient* (1967): 559.

The other book by Maha Sila Viravong on Chao Anou is also in Lao and entitled: “Phraraj Pawat Khong Somdej Phrachao Anouvong savong Vientiane” (Royal chronicle of His Majesty the King Anouvong, the Past monarch of the dynasty of Vientiane) (Vientiane, Ministry of Religious Affairs, 1969, Kingdom of Laos), 74pp. The title exemplifies the nationalistic flavour of the book which considers Chao Anou as a king, and not “an ungrateful prince” as viewed by Bangkok.

It is interesting to notice that before his death one year ago, Maha Sila Viravong told us that things did not happen in the fashion of the scenario he put forward in his “Lao history”, and in a worthy endeavour, he succeeded in producing a new draft of his “Lao history”, among the other masterpieces which this respected veteran historian has penned.

⁷⁶Even after 1975. See Thao Thanongsingh Kinghom: “The uprising of the Lao people under the leadership of Chao Anou, 1827–1829” (in Lao) (Vientiane University, 1986), p. 47.

Brosse and Sagouane Rotboun, issued by the French in 1934. The second edition of this textbook was issued in 1968.

However, up to 1975, the Lao people has maintained a historical consciousness,⁷⁷ in part stimulated by perceived Thai hegemonic ambitions.⁷⁸ This is manifested, by Khamchand Pradith, a Lao diplomat posted in Washington and New York, and close to Prince Souvanna Phouma, who wrote an essay on “Diplomatic History of Laos” (1971) and “The Place of Laos in Southeast Asia” (1967), the first in Lao and the second in French. The Lao ministry of Education organized a seminar on Lao history in 1971 (15 September–10 October), with 202 pages of proceedings, and the section on the Chao Anou story was issued by the Lao historian Maha Samrit Boisisawat. Not surprisingly, the content is not different from Chao Phraya Thiphrakarawong’s “model”, but the interpretation is a nationalistic one. Chao Khammanh Vongkot Rattana (offspring of the Front Palace of Louang Prabang) has published in 1973 a “History of the Lao Nation”, which is different of the “mainstream”, it being his princely recollections of events from the late XIX century to 1949.⁷⁹ The Lao National Library, until 1975, published primary documents on Lao history gathered by Maha Kikeo Somphou Oudom, such as the Chronicle of Xieng Khouang, Chronicle of Louang Prabang and Chronicle of Lao Kham (or Chronicle of Chao Ratsavong).⁸⁰ The Lao literature masterpiece “Sane leub Pha Soun” has been deciphered and published. The authorship of this masterpiece is generally attributed to Chau Anou.

In the liberated zone, until 1975, Lao history served as valuable reference that gave pride to the Lao people in the struggle against the French and the Americans. The first Lao revolutionary unit, created in 1949 by Kaysonne Phomvihane currently Secretary General of the ruling party, was named after the Lao commander in chief in the 1827 war, Chao Ratsavong, who was the son of Chao Anou.

After 1975, the Lao Government tried to draft an official history. Maha Kham Champa Keomany, a historian during the Royal Regime, had collected all the available primary documents and had them typed, and issued for discussion. Based on these documents, he worked on his “Lao history”, which came to nine volumes with 798 typewritten pages, and remained unfinished when he died, exhausted, in 1980. He had planned to write a chapter on Chao Anou. His work served as a basis for further study on Lao history by the National Institute for Social Sciences which presented in 1988 a draft of Lao history to the government. The draft has to be reviewed, for it is too long (377 pages) for use in secondary schools.

⁷⁷Joel M. Halpern, *idem*, footnote 48, pointed out: “Outside of a few school textbooks and some volumes on Lao history, printed matter in Lao is severely limited...” “... for [there is] difficulty attracting a sufficient audience”.

⁷⁸“The Lao are very sensitive to domination by the Thai”, J.M. Halpern, *idem*, p. 24.

⁷⁹David K. Wyatt, *Thailand. A short history* (Bangkok: Thai Watana Panich — Yale University Press, 1984). We think that this book is certainly a continuation of an history of Laos that his father, Prince Phetsarath, intended to write. Prince Phetsarath, late viceroy of Laos “was currently preparing a book on the history of Laos (as far as I can determine unfinished at his death Oct. 1959)”. Joel M. Halpern, *idem*, p. 123.

⁸⁰The latter summarised and translated by Charles Archaimbault, “Contribution a l’etude d’un cycle de legendes Lao” (Paris: Ecole Francaise d’Extreme Orient, 1980).

From 1975, there has certainly been an intensification of Lao historical consciousness.⁸¹ As Mopert stressed, the Lao communist movement has followed the classic path starting with the millenarian step, continuing with the nationalistic phase and then the communist one.⁸²

In an article entitled “The fruit doesn’t fall far from the tree”, on Lao oral history in both Laos and Northeast Thailand, Mayoury Ngaosyvathn began thus:

Whatever their present situation and no matter how far from their homeland it is, people rooted in the same nationality certainly preserve more or less their national characteristics. For the Lao people too, the invisible link with the nation, the nationhood, is inborn and transmitted from generation to generation.⁸³

The oral tradition about Chao Anou and especially Chao Ratsavong’s prowess is a vivid illustration of this phenomenon.⁸⁴ The Lao people hold on to ideas of patriotism, indomitable struggle, and faith in the future of their country.

⁸¹The first Lao National Seminar on palm-leaf manuscripts has been organised by the Lao People’s Democratic Republic Government on 10th–13th March 1988.

⁸²Francoise Moppert, *La revolte des Bolovens (1901–1936)*, in Pierre Brocheux (ed.), “Histoire de l’Asie du Sud-Est. Revoltes, reformes et revolutionnaires” (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1980).

⁸³See note 70.

⁸⁴See Fang Say, “Thousand and thousand Ratsavong” (in Lao), *Vannasinh* (Ministry of Culture, Lao P.D.R., February 1984), pp. 9–11.

Each year, in May, the Lao people in the South, at the town of Savanakhet, perform a ceremony in honour of the spirit of Chao Ratsavong.