



## Another view of the “Closed-door policy” of the Nguyen Dynasty (Vietnam) with Western countries (1802 – 1858)

Tran Xuan Hiep, Tran Dinh Hung, Nguyen Tuan Binh, Nguyen Anh Chuong & Tran Thai Bao |

To cite this article: Tran Xuan Hiep, Tran Dinh Hung, Nguyen Tuan Binh, Nguyen Anh Chuong & Tran Thai Bao | (2021) Another view of the “Closed-door policy” of the Nguyen Dynasty (Vietnam) with Western countries (1802 – 1858), Cogent Arts & Humanities, 8:1, 1973648, DOI: [10.1080/23311983.2021.1973648](https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2021.1973648)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2021.1973648>



© 2021 The Author(s). This open access article is distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) 4.0 license.



Published online: 06 Sep 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Received: 03 January 2021  
Accepted: 24 August 2021

\*Corresponding author: Tran Xuan Hiep, Institute of Socio-Economic Research, Duy Tan University, Da Nang 550000, Vietnam  
E-mail: [tranxuanhiep@dtu.edu.vn](mailto:tranxuanhiep@dtu.edu.vn)

Reviewing editor:  
Samuel Adu-Gyamfi, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology College of Arts and Social Science, Kumasi, Ghana

Additional information is available at the end of the article

## HISTORY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Another view of the “Closed-door policy” of the Nguyen Dynasty (Vietnam) with Western countries (1802 – 1858)

Tran Xuan Hiep<sup>1\*</sup>, Tran Dinh Hung<sup>1</sup>, Nguyen Tuan Binh<sup>2</sup>, Nguyen Anh Chuong<sup>3</sup> and Tran Thai Bao<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The Nguyen Dynasty was the last monarchy in Vietnamese history, established after Nguyen Anh ascended the throne in 1802 and ended when Bao Dai abdicated in 1945, a total of 143 years. Stemming from the sense of protecting the throne of the feudal regime associated with the protection of national security, the Nguyen kings implemented foreign policy in a complicated historical context, especially was in the face of the growing pressure of Western colonialism. As a result, The Nguyen Kings had a “difficult problem” with behavioral culture and foreign policies with Western countries, particularly France, leading to implementing an “unclear” and “inconsistent” foreign policy. This article presents a different perspective on the Nguyen Dynasty's relations with Western countries during the



Tran Xuan Hiep

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tran Xuan Hiep, PhD, is a member of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and a researcher at the Institute of Socio-Economic Research, Duy Tan University. General political and international relations issues, the Southeast Asian region, and Vietnam's international integration are among his main research interests. He has published many papers on above theme such as, *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs*, *International Journal of China Studies*, *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, *Contemporary Chinese Political Economy and Strategic Relations*, *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, *Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business*.  
Nguyen Tuan Binh, PhD, is a lecturer at the History Faculty, Hue University of Education. His writings focus on colonialism, Indochina wars, and Vietnam's foreign policy. He has published papers in Scopus journals.  
Tran Dinh Hung and Tran Thai Bao are lecturers at Duy Tan University. Their research interests are modern history and international relations They collaborated on a book on *Modern International Relations*, which they co-authored.  
Nguyen Anh Chuong is the lecturer at Vinh University. He received his PhD in World History conferred by Nanjing University, China in 2011. His publications are related to colonialism, Indochina wars, and Vietnam's foreign policies

### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Vietnamese feudalism was on the decline during the Nguyen dynasty's reign in the mid-nineteenth century, and the situation became even more difficult when the country faced invasion by Western colonialists. In that context, the Nguyen Dynasty made a foreign policy error that resulted in the country's loss to French colonialists. This study adds a new perspective on the Nguyen dynasty's behavior toward Western countries, allowing for a more accurate assessment of the Nguyen dynasty's contributions and limitations in foreign policies, particularly in relation to modern Britain, France, and America.

**Table 1. Thirteen Kings of the Nguyen Dynasty (1802–1945)**

No	Personal name	Regnal name	Reign
1	Nguyen Phuc Anh	Gia Long	1802–1819
2	Nguyen Phuc Dam	Minh Mang	1820–1840
3	Nguyen Phuc Mien Tong	Thieu Tri	1841–1847
4	Nguyen Phuc Hong Nham	Tu Duc	1848–1883
5	Nguyen Phuc Ung Chan	Duc Duc	1883 (3 days)
6	Nguyen Phuc Hong Dat	Hiep Hoa	1883 (4 months)
7	Nguyen Phuc Ung Dang	Kien Phuc	1884
8	Nguyen Phuc Ung Lich	Ham Nghi	1885
9	Nguyen Phuc Ung Duong	Dong Khanh	1886–1888
10	Nguyen Phuc Buu Lan	Thanh Thai	1889–1907
11	Nguyen Phuc Vinh San	Duy Tan	1907–1916
12	Nguyen Phuc Buu Dao	Khai Dinh	1916–1925
13	Nguyen Phuc Vinh Thuy	Bao Dai	1926–1945

period of independence and self-control (1802–1858). Accordingly, the author look at the Nguyen Dynasty’s Diplomatic relations to the West in the view of the development, with the approach: From Limited access policy (under reigns of King Gia Long and King Minh Mang) to Anti-access policy (under reigns of King Thieu Tri and King Tu Duc). From there, it shows a different view of the contact process between Eastern and Western civilizations, specifically between Vietnam and other countries, such as France, Britain, and America in the Modern period.

**Subjects: History; International Relations; Social Sciences; Education**

**Keywords: Nguyen Dynasty; limited access; Anti-access; “Closed-door”**

### 1. Introduction

The Nguyen Dynasty was Vietnam’s last feudal dynasty, ruling for 143 years (1802–1945) and was under 13 kings (See Table 1). The Nguyen Dynasty could be divided into two phases over the course of its 143-year existence: During the reigns of Kings Gia Long, Minh Mang, Thieu Tri, and a portion of King Tu Duc, the country was independent. But after the death of this fourth king, the French colonialists put a direct pressure on the court of Hue, forcing the Nguyen Dynasty to sign the Treaty of Patenôtre on 6 June 1884, and deprive Vietnam of independence. Although there were many reasons leading to the defeat of the Nguyen Dynasty against the invasion of the French colonialists, the foreign policies of the Nguyen Dynasty was still decisive for this failure

Many scholars in Vietnam and abroad studied the Nguyen Dynasty’s foreign policies toward the West (1802–1858). Before the year 2000, the authors shared the following viewpoints on the subject: (1) It was a policy of “closed doors” and “rebuffing” the West; (2) Nguyen Dynasty kings “prohibited and murdered Christians,” and “discriminated Westerners”; (3) The political visionaries of the Nguyen Dynasty kings were “short-sighted” and “blind”.

Many new publications and nearly 20 scientific workshops related to the Nguyen dynasty have been published since 2000, including the book “The history of the Nguyen Dynasty—A new approach” in 2005, which collected many articles from many scholars who study the Nguyen Dynasty, and the Conference on “Nguyen Lords and the Nguyen Dynasty in the History of Vietnam”

in 2006. In general, almost all researchers agreed on some new and different perspectives on the Nguyen dynasty's foreign policies with Western countries, such as: (1) placing that policy in the context of complicated history at the time in order to "understand" and "sympathize" with the Nguyen dynasty's closure rather than a radical critique; (2) the Nguyen dynasty was not a completely "closed" country; (3) foreign policies was not entirely wrong, sometimes soft, subtle; (4) It was the "duality" policy, as well as the conflict between "closed-door" and "open-door" policies ...

This paper does not aim to refute the preceding viewpoints, but rather to present a different perspective on the Nguyen Dynasty's relations with Western countries during the independence and autonomy periods (1802–1858), ranging from "Limited access" to "Anti-access" policies.

## 2. Method

To demonstrate this point, this paper examines and analyzes events related to the Nguyen dynasty's contact with Western countries between 1802 and 1858, using historical sources such as: (1) the Nguyen Dynasty's official history and the records of Westerners who served in diplomatic missions in Vietnam at the time; and (2) scholars' research on the Nguyen Dynasty.

The study is based on the theory of development that looks the relationship between the Nguyen Dynasty and the Western countries in a historical and logical process, which includes the process of formation, movement and changes from king Gia Long to king Tu Duc. Besides there were some commons and differences in each kings' reign (Gia Long, Minh Mang, Thieu Tri, Tu Duc). This research method is appropriate for clarifying the statement: Nguyen Dynasty diplomatic methods to the West: from "limited access" policy to "anti-access" policy.

## 3. Result and discussion

Westerners have presented and established trade relations with Vietnam since the late sixteenth century. The first was Portugal, followed by the Netherlands, England, France, the United States of America, and so on. In the early period, the relationship between Vietnam and Western countries was generally good, equal, independent, and primarily focused on goods exchange and trade. Vietnam's feudal government allowed Westerners to come and trade and set up shops. In addition, they were not entitled to anything that would harm the interests of Vietnam (Khoang Phan, 1971). However, in the following centuries, especially during the period when the Nguyen Dynasty took control of the country, the situation changed in a different direction.

### 3.1. From "limited access" policy under reign of King Gia Long (1802-1819) and King Minh Mang (1820-1840) ...

"Limited access" is a new term coined by the author and applied to the Nguyen Dynasty's foreign policy toward Western countries in this article. The term "limited access" is understood to mean that while King Gia Long and King Minh Mang maintained relations with Western countries, they set clear limits by establishing a framework to control and limit their penetration and influence in Vietnamese territory.

Nguyen Anh (King Gia Long) ascended to the throne in July 1802, ushering in a period of Nguyen dynasty dominance in Vietnam (1802–1945). Foreign policies of this monarch with the West had been shaped under this king. In the history of Vietnam, King Gia Long was the first king cooperating with the West comprehensively and methodically in military and in diplomatic, economic and political aspects. Yoshiharu Tsuboi commented: "If compared with China, Korea and Japan at the same period, King Gia Long had a lot of experience in collaborating with Westerners, especially French, and had applied many techniques of the West" (Tsuboi, 1998).

Under King Gia Long, the "closed door" policy was shaped. This policy was formed from the fear of the strength and intervention of the French army in particular, the West in general in the internal affairs of the country; from the worry about the consequences that Christianity caused to

the country, from choosing to return to the traditional model of viewing China and Confucianism as the model that the Nguyen Dynasty considered superior rulers, and at the same time discriminating against people and Western cultures that were too foreign and different from the Vietnamese people (Chuong Dang Van, 2016).

For France, King Gia Long had a special favor relationship that was established before 1802, after becoming a king, he proved to be intimate with French, and bestowed France's favor in relations, particularly in the reception ceremony. (That, 1995; Trong, 1971). However, the king usually warned his courtiers about threats to national security from the trade and French missionaries. When the Western countries, including France showed desire to establish commercial firms in the ports of Vietnam, he adamantly refused: "The port is extremely important place, completely impossible for the office of foreigners" (Quoc Su quan trieu Nguyen (The Nguyen Dynasty's Institute for National History), 2001).

Furthermore, Gia Long almost entirely conducted trade relations with France. Some French merchants in Bordeaux as Baguerie, Stuttenberg, Philippon sent trading ships to Vietnam in the years 1817–1819 and They were treated well and allowed to import goods duty-free. (Son Pham Van, 1983). French officials, such as Chaigneau, repeatedly persuaded King Gia Long to allow the establishment of diplomatic and trade relations with France, but they were unsuccessful. (McLeod, 1991; Wilcox, 2010).

Restrictive policy of Gia Long was also reflected in the rules, principles and frameworks in dealing with France and the West. After ascending the throne (1802), King Gia Long chose Danang port as a place to welcome the foreigners on behalf of diplomatic envoys or merchants. Since then, Da Nang port became the only official port welcoming the guests who come from the West. Nguyen dynasty only welcomed Westerners on condition that they had credentials. If they had the credentials, the two parties would have to cooperate closely with the procedure. Foreign embassies would normally arrive at Da Nang port and, after confirming their credentials and gifts to please the King, their boats would be docked after careful inspection. Then they were allowed to send people to the shore (with the supervision of the local soldiers) to purchase the necessary supplies such as food, drinks, charcoal ... And everyone must stay on ships waiting for local officials write a report to consult the king. King's directives often come after 10 to 15 days after the ship docked. Urgent cases, the response of the court may be within three days.

Before the 17th year of Gia Long (1817), foreign ships arriving in Da Nang were greeted by the "flag and firing 21 shots of cannon However, the king later restricted shooting to 3 to 6 shots only. If the king agreed, the official reception of the host country was held in Hue court, but it was usually held in Da Nang by a representative of the court or officials of Thuong Bac Affairs in coordination with local officials and soldiers.

For the rest of the Western world, the relationship ended with welcoming ceremonies and regular trade. In 1804, King Gia Long sent an ambassador named John W. Roberts to request gifts and credentials in order to establish commercial trade in Tra Son, Quang Nam, but King Gia Long refused (Fry, 2013). They then attempted to send credentials several times but failed each time (Trong, 1971). The reasons King Gia Long refused diplomatic relations with the British were as follows: "the British are cunning, deceitful, not our race, their heart is certainly different from ours" (Quoc Su quan trieu Nguyen (The Nguyen Dynasty's Institute for National History), 2001).

This policy of Gia Long showed clear intentions that not allowing the West the opportunity to penetrate or establish bases, just albeit commercial base on the Vietnam territory. He said that it would jeopardize the national security. The speech also showed his contempt attitude with the Westerners.

In 1803, a US merchant ship, called “Fame” brought Captain Jeremiah Briggs to Cochinchina (Vietnam) in an effort to find new sources of sugar and coffee. They were allowed trafficking by Gia Long in Vietnam (Miller, 1990). The second and third visitings of Americans in 1819 and was also welcomed thoughtfully. However, the sale of the Americans in Vietnam did not obtain significant results (Miller, 1990).

Cao Huy Thuan, commenting on King Gia Long’s policies, has been very reasonable to assume that, while Gia Long’s policies with the West were generally cold, he still preserved and did not become official contacts and the political commitment to the Western governments to not fall into the errors that India did (Huy, 1988). King Gia Long implemented a flexible and clever diplomacy. He made a clear distinction between relations with France and the French. Gia Long was extremely cautious in his communication with France. He was soft and flexible in all interactions, but in principle he was tough and resolutely refused all unreasonable requests from France. Gia Long always gave special treatment to French people who contacted him to assist him in the process of regaining the throne, but in his heart, he did not appreciate neither Europeans nor Christians.

Hal Dareff confirmed Gia Long’s intention to “close the border” in order to “prevent the entry of foreigners with their strange way of life, but the country had already existed foreigners—the missionaries” (Dareff, 1971). Indeed, Christianity was a difficult and complex issue in external relations with the West under King Gia Long and succeeding kings. Gia Long was worried about the Western threat, but he lacked and was unable to devise a strategy to adapt to the new situation: maintain normal relations with the French, France. In order to avoid having to give those countries political and commercial privileges, as well as avoid unnecessary dependencies on Western countries with complicated political commitments that would have consequences later, the king did not have any special treatment when it came to trade with other Western countries. (Nam, 2005).

In fact, the expansion of Western colonialism had always been associated with the spread of Christianity. At the end of the sixteenth century, Western missionaries began to come to Vietnam to evangelize. Since the 17th century, missionary activities in Vietnam had been promoted faster by missionaries, especially Portuguese Jesuit missionaries who had been very active in evangelizing the Kingdom of God. This is regarded as an effective tool for serving the invasion policy of Western colonial countries. Aside from evangelizing, they must also observe and report on the situation in the countries when they return to their home country; this is a method of gathering confidential information.

Facing that situation, the Vietnamese feudal government took many measures to ban the religion by expelling clergy, forcing parishioners to abandon their religion, destroying churches ... However, the feudal government’s prohibition on religion seemed not to achieve the desired results because the teachings were deeply rooted in the spiritual life of the laity. Many people were dissatisfied with social evils, disgusted with real life, thus they abandoned traditional customs to convert to Christianity. The number of parishioners increased and the conflicts between christians and non- christians also began to arise, sometimes turning into bitter conflicts. This was also an important reason leading to the policy of banning religion of later dynasties, especially under the Nguyen Dynasty.

Before his death, King Gia Long had chosen Prince Dam (King Minh Mang, 1820–1840) as successor with the intention that man not only inherited the throne, but also inherited his will. He instructed his successor: “Be grateful to the French, but never let them set foot in your court” (Barrow, 1806). Regarding the issue of religious prohibition, Gia Long also told Minh Mang that “The persecution of beliefs always creates an opportunity for ups and downs and animosity among the people, often toppling the throne” (Quang Nguyen Phan, 1999). In fact, King Minh Mang was the only king who implemented the basic ways of Gia Long” (Phan & Xuan, 2000).

Minh Mang had a cold attitude toward the French, and he refused all requests for formal diplomatic relations or the signing of any trade agreement between the two countries, allowing only the maintenance of friendly relations and normal trade, and they had to follow strict regulations that had existed previously. In 1821, 1822,<sup>1</sup> 1824, France sent warships constantly to Vietnam to negotiate formal treaty, but all were rejected (Quoc Su quan trieu Nguyen (The Nguyen Dynasty's Institute for National History), 2001; Quoc Su quan trieu Nguyen (The Nguyen Dynasty's Institute for National History), 2010). There were many reasons why King Minh Mang pursued a distinct foreign policy toward France, but the primary reason stemmed from a desire to protect the country's independence and national security from being jeopardized. However, King Minh Mang also understood that if he continued the strict policy, it would give countries an excuse to provoke, a conflict between Vietnam and France might happen. Therefore, Minh Mang refused to sign commercial treaties, but did not prohibit French and Western countries' ships and merchants from coming to Vietnam to trade, and the French missionary activities were not banned completely.

For Americans, in 1832 and 1836, Edmund Roberts, special envoy of US President, made two trips to Vietnam with the aim of "signing the trade agreement in favor of the US trade" (Richardson, 1896) and Nguyen Dynasty were welcome (Quoc Su quan trieu Nguyen (The Nguyen Dynasty's Institute for National History), 2010). In 1832, the first official US diplomatic mission to Vietnam led by Edmond Roberts to establish diplomatic relations. Although the negotiation results were not as desired, King Minh Mang agreed to allow the United States to trade in Vietnam and must obey the country's laws applicable to foreigners. At the same time, Minh Mang also specified that if the Americans came again, they would let the ship dock at Son Tra, in the Han estuary of Quang Nam province (today in Da Nang), they were allowed to trade here but were not allowed to build houses. (Quoc Su quan trieu Nguyen (The Nguyen Dynasty's Institute for National History), 2001).

Later, Roberts was also led by Nguyen Dynasty officials to visit Saigon, Da Nang and Hoi An. The second time was in 1836, the US Government continued to send Ed.Roberts to lead the delegation to Vietnam, the purpose of this trip was to sign a trade treaty. But unfortunately, Roberts was seriously ill and had to leave Vietnam soon for medical treatment and died in Macao, while the two sides have not yet reached a more important agreement.

As a result, the Americans' trips did not yield concrete results; the cause was attributed to both parties' deep disagreements over diplomatic etiquette, the language barrier, and other factors. (Roberts, 1837), (Pan & Lyons, 1966; Ruschenberger, 1838). While Roberts and some scholars believed that the conflict of protocol was the cause of the failure, but I think it's just an excuse for Nguyen government's refusal of the American proposals. The root cause was that the Minh Mang did not want to establish any state relations with the West; this was a long-standing policy. Even if there was no cultural clash between the two countries, the US mission's goal was difficult to achieve.

For England, John Crawfurd led a mission to Vietnam in 1821 for the sole purpose of trafficking like other countries. Crawfurd 'discovered' in his diary that the Vietnamese people were a stickler for ceremony and had a very pretentious character. His mission was treated with a perfect respect, but they were also tightly controlled as prisoners. Crawfurd was denied to meet Emperor Minh Mang with reason "this man is just one officer dispatched by a Governor, not by a monarch's orders" (Quoc Su quan trieu Nguyen (The Nguyen Dynasty's Institute for National History), 2010). Crawfurd's voyage was generally unsuccessful in the absence of a diplomatic treaty between the two countries, but Crawfurd was announced that the British could trade in the middle of Vietnam (Crawfurd, 1830). According to the instruction of King Minh Mang, British ships had the right to come and trade at ports where Chinese ships were currently trading, including Saigon port, Han port (Da Nang), Thuan An (Hue) (Gaultier, 1935). In 1822, the British ambassador brought his credentials and gifts (including 500 classic guns and a pair of crystal lamps) to ask for trade, but

King Minh Mang refused (Bich Nguyen Luong, 1996). Later, British ships docked in Vietnam on several occasions, but they did not achieve the desired result.

It can be seen that Minh Mang continued Gia Long's policy. Of course, the Westerners didn't just want such a relationship; it was also incompatible with Western diplomacy. Because the two sides took opposite approaches to this issue, negotiations frequently stalled without yielding any results.

In 1939, the Opium War broke out in China, which made King Minh Mang be aware of the risk that Vietnam faced in case of continuing "closed-door" policy. In 1840, he hastily appointed a delegation to Penang, Calcutta, Djakarta to probe the situation (Thi, 2012). Particularly, Minh Mang sent an envoy led by Ton That Tuong to France with the proposal for applying for the French a commercial agreement in Vietnam, in exchange for a commitment to protect Vietnam in case of Vietnam was attacked (Honey, 1968). This trip was the first time "active" negotiation of Nguyen Dynasty conducted at a state-level diplomacy with Western countries. It was a shift in foreign policies with the West of Minh Mang. If Minh Mang had not died suddenly, the situation might have been different. Unfortunately, Thieu Tri and Tu Duc, his two successors, did not continue this groundbreaking work.

### **3.2. ... To "anti-access" policy under the reign of King Thieu Tri (1841-1848) and King Tu Duc (1848-1858)**

The term "anti-access" is also being used to describe the Nguyen Dynasty's foreign policies toward the West during the reigns of King Thieu Tri and King Tu Duc. Anti-access policy entails denying or refusing any contact, diplomatic or commercial relationship (including normal trade) with Western countries, as well as "closing" the country to foreigners and denying them access to the tertiary sector.

The diplomatic door of the Nguyen Dynasty with the West was completely "shut down" during the reigns of King Thieu Tri (1841-1847) and especially King Tu Duc (1848-1883). King Thieu Tri implemented a peaceful and soft foreign policy with Western countries during his early years in power, particularly in matters of evangelization. Western countries, particularly France, had, on the other hand, consistently provoked Vietnam. Thieu Tri responded by enacting Minh Mang's "no-Western" policy and reintroducing the "religion ban." Direct contact between the two sides was forbidden by King Thieu Tri. Vietnam's relations with Western countries deteriorated since then.

The French and American warships docked in Danang in 1843, 1845, and 1847, putting pressure on the Hue court to release the French clergy held in Hue (Shreiner, 1905). (Dac, 2008; The Colonial Moment The Making of French Indochina, 1958-1897). In Danang, even in 1847, the French and Vietnamese navies fought ferociously. "The Nguyens' Failure". He also ordered the destruction of all items purchased from the West, as well as the creation of effigies of Western soldiers to be shot. Clearly, it was "a childish reaction," demonstrating the deadlock and inability of Vietnam's king at the time. Following these events, the persecution of Christians and the implementation of a closed-door policy were elevated to new heights. Thieu Tri, on the other hand, erected more ramparts and fortresses in a short period of time.

To the British, knowing information Nguyen Dynasty conflicted with the French, John F. Davis, carrying the Queen Victoria's credentials to Vietnam emperor to discuss the signing of a trade treaty and establish diplomatic relation. Gutzlaff, who accompanied with Davis to Vietnam in May 3/1847, recorded that: He went ashore twice to deliver the Queen's letter to Emperor Vietnam, but no one got it. They were also barred from traveling to Hue, the capital, to express their desires. (Gregory, 2008; Wrigh, 1970).

Thieu Tri died in November 1847, and Tu Duc ascended to the throne at a time when the Hue court's relationship with the West, particularly France, was deteriorating. The issue of Christianity remained a major issue in the Tu Duc dynasty's foreign policies with France and the West. The banning of Christians from Minh Mang until Tu Duc at beginning were not effective. He decided to increase the "intensity" of the religious ban with more stringent edicts because he has yet to find a more effective solution. (Phat,



1958). Tu Duc issued two edicts in 1851 and 1855 to expel foreign missionaries who were still sneaking into Vietnam. As a result, the content of these edicts included stringent rules such as tying a stone around one's neck and throwing preachers into the sea. Local priests who refused to renounce their faith had inscriptions carved into their faces and were then sent far away, dismembering priests who refused to renounce their faith and those who supported foreign missionaries. These edicts launched a nationwide movement to ban and kill religion. This became a particularly important reason for the French to intervene in Vietnam, proceeding to launch a war of aggression.

Under these circumstances, the French emperor decided to send Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Charles de Montigny to Vietnam to negotiate. While Montigny was in Siam and Cambodia, William de Ville-sur-Lelieur Arc dispatched the *Catinat* warship to Danang on 16 September 1856, to deliver Montigny's letter to King Tu Duc, but the local officials refused to accept the French letter. Lelieur sailed to the sea port of Thuan An to post, but the Vietnamese officials did not recognize him. Lelieur was forced to stay on the coast and return to Danang. Here, the *Lelieur* warship fired on Danang, sending an army ashore to lock the 60 cannons and pour large amounts of gunpowder into the sea. (Shreiner, 1905).

Montigny arrived in Danang on January 23/1857. Montigny wanted to sign a trade treaty between the two countries, establish a French consulate in Hue, open the Danang sea port, and free Christian missionaries as part of the content negotiations. In response, the Hue royal court, as in the past, denied all requests. Montigny was enraged, claiming that his proposals were civilized diplomatic procedures that countries accepted, whereas the treatment of the Nguyen Dynasty was a humiliation for France and the only way to get results by using threatening force. This was the French diplomacy's final attempt, which was overseen by professional diplomatic envoys but failed to yield any results. In the meantime, many officials and clergy in France continued to advocate for the use of force to invade Vietnam. The port of Danang was attacked by a French expeditionary army in 1858. Therefrom, a new chapter in the relationship between Vietnam and France opened, which in tandem with the losing national territory and sovereignty in the hands of the French, the autonomy and self-determination in relation to the French in particular and the West in general has gradually slipped from the hands of the Nguyen dynasty.

#### 4. Conclusion

In 1802, Nguyen Phuc Anh ascended the throne, renamed the era Gia Long, and founded a new dynasty in Vietnamese feudal history: the Nguyen Dynasty. From Gia Long to Tu Duc, the Nguyen kings successively built and consolidated their dominance, protecting the feudal system in the midst of a decline. However, Vietnamese society under the Nguyen Dynasty hardly progressed in the progressive direction of the times for more than half of the nineteenth century. Deep social divisions sparked a series of major uprisings by peasants and ethnic minorities, and Vietnam was eventually colonized by the West.

The Hue court had developed a prudent and highly defensive foreign policy towards the adverse effects of the West in the context of a complex history in the first half of the nineteenth century, in which the penetration of Western elements was considered a great threat to national security and traditional culture of the nation. King Gia Long shaped the "limited access" policy by "limiting" contact and access from the West through a system of mandatory principles and rituals, as well as rejecting any proposal from Westerners to sign a trade or diplomatic agreement. Minh Mang adopted the "Gia Long style" of diplomacy. This diplomatic door, however, was closed during the reigns of King Thieu Tri and King Tu Duc. In other words, it was a change in policy from limited access to anti-access. This foreign policy was clearly ineffective, as it resulted in negative consequences for the Nguyen dynasty and the country.

### Funding

The authors received no direct funding for this research.

### Author details

Tran Xuan Hiep<sup>1</sup>

E-mail: [tranxuanhiep@dtu.edu.vn](mailto:tranxuanhiep@dtu.edu.vn)

ORCID ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5236-993X>

Tran Dinh Hung<sup>1</sup>

Nguyen Tuan Binh<sup>2</sup>

Nguyen Anh Chuong<sup>3</sup>

Tran Thai Bao<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Institute of Socio-Economic Research, Duy Tan University, Da Nang 550000, Vietnam.

<sup>2</sup> Department of History, University of Education, Hue University 530000, Vietnam.

<sup>3</sup> School of Social Sciences Education, Vinh University, Nghe An, Vietnam.

### Citation information

Cite this article as: Another view of the “Closed-door policy” of the Nguyen Dynasty (Vietnam) with Western countries (1802 – 1858), Tran Xuan Hiep, Tran Dinh Hung, Nguyen Tuan Binh, Nguyen Anh Chuong & Tran Thai Bao, *Cogent Arts & Humanities* (2021), 8: 1973648.

### Note

1. In 1822, the French warship Cleopatre docked at the port of Da Nang, the captain asked for an audience but King Minh Mang did not allow it.

### Citation information Cite this article as

Another view of the “Closed-door policy” of the Nguyen Dynasty (Vietnam) with Western countries (1802 – 1858), Tran Xuan Hiep, Tran Dinh Hung, Nguyen Tuan Binh, Nguyen Anh Chuong, Tran Thai Bao, *Cogent Social Sciences* (2021).

### References

- Barrow, J. (1806). *A voyage to Cochinchina in the year, 1792 and 1793*. London.
- The Colonial Moment *The Making of French Indochina. (1958-1897)*. <http://www.ucpress.edu/content/chapters/10448.ch01.pdf>
- Crawford, J. (1830). *Journal of an embassy from the governor-general of india to the courts of Siam and Cochinchina; exhibiting a view of the actual State of Those Kingdoms*. London.
- Dac, X. N. (2008). *Constitution of the United States vessel opening French colonial war to conquer Vietnam Nguyen Dynasty*. Hanoi.
- Dareff, H. (1971). *The Story of Vietnam, a background book on the war in Southeast Asia*. Parents' Magazine Press. New York.
- Fry, H. T. (2013). *Alexander Dalrymple and the Expansion of British Trade*. Routledge.
- Gaultier, M. (1935). *Minh Mang*. Larose, Paris.
- Gregory, L. J. (2008). *Opening China: Karl F.A. Gtzlaff and Sino-Western Relations, 1827-1852*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.
- Honey, P. J. (1968). *Genesis of a tragedy: The historical background to the Vietnam War*. Benn.
- Huy, T. C. (1988). *Catholicism and colonialism in Vietnam*. Paris university.
- Luong, B. N. (1996). *A brief history of Vietnam's diplomacy in previous times*. People's Army Publishing House.
- McLeod, M. W. (1991). *The Vietnamese response to French intervention, 1862-1874*. Praeger.
- Miller, R. H. (1990). *The United States and Vietnam, 1787-1941*. DIANE Publishing.
- Nam, T. T. (2005). *Diplomacy between Vietnam and Western countries under the Nguyen Dynasty*. Ho Chi Minh City National University Publishing House.
- Pan, S., & Lyons, D. (1966). *Vietnam Crisis*. The East Asian Research Institute, Riverside.
- Phan, K. (1971). *French colonial history*. Khai Tri.
- Phan, Q. N. (1999). *Vietnam in 19th century (1802-1884)*. Ho Chi Minh City Publishing House.
- Phan, Q. N., & Xuan, D. V. (2000). *Vietnam's history from the origins to 1884*. Ho Chi Minh city Publishing House.
- Phat, H. P. (1958). *Vietnam catholic history (Vol. 1)*. Sai Gon. Quoc Su quan trieu Nguyen (The Nguyen Dynasty's Institute for National History). (2001) . *Dai Nam thuc luc*. Education Publishing House.
- Quoc Su quan trieu Nguyen (The Nguyen Dynasty's Institute for National History). (2010) . *Minh Mang chinh yeu*. Thuan Hoa Publishing House.
- Richardson, J. D. (1896). *A compilation of the messages and papers of the presidents, 1789-1897*. Government Printing Office.
- Roberts, E. (1837). *Embassy to the Eastern Courts of Cochinchina, Siam, and Muscat, in the U.S. Sloop-of-War Peacock, David Geisinger, Commander, During the Years 1832-3-4*. New York.
- Ruschenberger, W. S. W. (1838). *A Voyage Round the World; Including An Embassy to Muscat and Siam, in 1835, 1836, and 1837*. Carey, Lea, & Blanchard.
- Shreiner, A. (1905). *A brief of Dai Nam*. Sai Gon.
- That, B. T. (1995). *Storytelling Nguyen's kings*. Thuan Hoa Publishing House.
- Thi, D. D. (2012). The change in foreign policies with the West of King Minh Mang. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 3(144), 37-44.
- Trong, K. T. (1971). *A brief history of Viet Nam*. Sai Gon.
- Tsuboi, Y. (1998). *Dai Nam Country facing France and China, 1847-1885*. Youth Publishing House.
- Van, C. D. (editor). (2016). *Policy of “closing up” and “opening up” of some Southeast Asian countries from the end of the 18th century to the end of the 19th century*. Ho Chi Minh City Publishing House.
- Van, S. P. (1983). *Complete history of Vietnamese*. Japan.
- Wilcox, W. (2010). *Vietnam and the West: New Approaches*. SEAP Publications.
- Wright, L. R. (1970). *The Origins of British Borneo*. Hong Kong University Press.



© 2021 The Author(s). This open access article is distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) 4.0 license.

You are free to:

Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format.

Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially.

The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms.

Under the following terms:

Attribution — You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made.

You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

No additional restrictions

You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.



**Cogent Arts & Humanities (ISSN: 2331-1983) is published by Cogent OA, part of Taylor & Francis Group.**

**Publishing with Cogent OA ensures:**

- Immediate, universal access to your article on publication
- High visibility and discoverability via the Cogent OA website as well as Taylor & Francis Online
- Download and citation statistics for your article
- Rapid online publication
- Input from, and dialog with, expert editors and editorial boards
- Retention of full copyright of your article
- Guaranteed legacy preservation of your article
- Discounts and waivers for authors in developing regions

**Submit your manuscript to a Cogent OA journal at [www.CogentOA.com](http://www.CogentOA.com)**

