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Southeast Asian Studies Program
Graduate School, Chulalongkorn University
in cooperation with the Rockefeller Foundation

NO.
3

Nguyen Anh Tai

RELATIONS BETWEEN THE THAIS
AND THE VIETNAMESE
DURING THE FIRST INDOCHINA WAR
(1946-1954)

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2013

***Relations between the Thais and the Vietnamese
during the First Indochinese War (1946-1954)***

by Nguyen Anh Tai

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Graduate School, Chulalongkorn University

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CONTENTS

Contents.....	iii
List of Figures and Tables.....	v
List of Abbreviations.....	vi
Preface.....	vii
Series Editor’s Notes.....	viii
Author’s Acknowledgments.....	ix
Abstract (English).....	xi
Abstract (Thai).....	xiii

Chapter 1 Introduction.....1

1.1	Background.....	1
1.2	Literature Review.....	5
1.2.1	Vietnamese Researchers and Scholars.....	5
1.2.2	Thai and Foreign Researchers and Scholars.....	7
1.3	Objectives.....	12
1.4	Methodology.....	12
1.5	Scope of the Study.....	13
1.6.	Limitations.....	15

Chapter 2 Historical Background of the Vietnamese Migration to Thailand.....17

2.1	Historical Background of the First Indochina War (1946-1954).....	17
2.2.	Migration of the Vietnamese Community into Thailand.....	22
2.2.1	Overview	22
2.2.2	The First Group: Vietnamese Migrants in Ayutthaya.....	25

2.2.3	The Second Group: From Nguyen Anh's Approach to Siam to the Early Bangkok Period.....	27
2.2.4	The Third Group: From the End of the 19 th to the Beginning of the 20 th Century.....	30
2.2.5	The Fourth Group: Migration in Post-World War II Years.....	33
2.3	Conclusion.....	35

Chapter 3 The Roles of Thai People in Northeastern Thailand.....38

3.1	Pridi and Seri Thai Politicians.....	39
3.2	Ho Chi Minh's Roles in Promoting the Relations between the Thais and Viet Kieu.....	45
3.3	The Help from the Thai in Northeastern Thailand.....	51
3.4	Conclusion.....	55

Chapter 4 The Roles of Viet Kieu in Thailand.....57

4.1.	Organizations and Activities of Viet Kieu in Northeastern Thailand.....	58
4.2	Vietnamese's Contributions to the Patriotic Movements.....	76
4.2.1	Soldiers.....	77
4.2.2	Weapons.....	84
4.2.3	Money.....	90
4.3	Conclusion.....	91

Chapter 5 Consequences for Vietnamese–Thai Relations.....94

5.1	Pridi Banomyong Period (1946-1947).....	95
5.1.1	Pridi Banomyong's Foreign Policy.....	95

5.1.2	Thai Government's Helps towards Viet Kieu....	98
5.1.3	People to People Relationship in Pridi Banomyong Period	102
5.2	P. Phibunsongkhram Period (1948-1954).....	106
5.2.1	The Impacts of External Powers on Thailand's Foreign and Domestic Policies.....	106
5.2.2	P. Phibunsongkhram's Policies towards the Viet Kieu in Thailand.....	115
5.2.3	People to People Relationship in P. Phibunsongkhram Period.....	127
5.3	Conclusion.....	137
	Chapter 6 Conclusion.....	141
	References.....	148
	Appendix.....	154
	Biography.....	157

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1:	Southeast Asian Countries (1945-1954).....	18
Figure 2:	Vietnamese Emigration to Siam (17 th – 20 th Centuries).....	24
Figure 3:	Ayutthaya and the Cochinese Quarter, 17 th Century.....	25
Figure 4:	Main concentrations of “old Vietnamese” in Thailand.....	31
Figure 5:	Viet Kieu Thailand in Thailand.....	67
Figure 6:	Concentration of Viet Kieu (Vietnamese refugees) in Thailand.....	119
Table 1:	Main concentrations of “Old Vietnamese” in Thailand.....	32

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCP	China Communist Party
CPT	Communist Party of Thailand
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
KMT	Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party)
MP(s)	Member(s) of Parliament
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
US	The United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics/The Soviet Union
WWII	World War II

PREFACE

The Southeast Asian Studies Program at Chulalongkorn University offers multidisciplinary courses and research training leading to a Master of Arts degree. From 2003, the year when the curriculum began, to 2010, the program was financially supported by the Rockefeller Foundation under the fellowship program entitled “Weaving the Mekong into Southeast Asia” or WMSEA. This support enabled the program to select outstanding candidates from Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam to take courses and conduct research for their M.A. degrees. Most of the theses written by these students and some other students in the program are interesting, diverse in topics, and provide insight into various issues of Southeast Asia.

In order to disseminate the new knowledge provided by those theses to the public, the program has initiated the “Monograph Series on Southeast Asia” publication project. For the first lot, twelve interesting theses of good quality have been selected for publication.

On behalf of the Southeast Asian Studies Program, I would like to express my gratitude to the Rockefeller Foundation for previously supporting students from Southeast Asian countries and for sponsoring the publication of the research monograph series. I hope that this research monograph will add to the reader’s knowledge of Southeast Asia and create a better understanding of this region and its people.

Sunait Chutintaranond
Director, Southeast Asian Studies Program
Chulalongkorn University

SERIES EDITOR'S NOTES

This research monograph is part of the first collection in the *Research Monograph Series on Southeast Asia* published by the Southeast Asian Studies Program, Graduate School, Chulalongkorn University in cooperation with the Rockefeller Foundation.

The first collection in the series is composed of twelve research monographs adapted from twelve M.A. theses in Southeast Asian Studies selected on the criteria of high evaluation, interesting topics, and great contribution to the study of Southeast Asia.

The editorial process of each research monograph consists of several procedures. First, it is edited for length and accuracy of the content by a scholar in Southeast Asian Studies. Secondly, the series editor edits it for consistency and appropriateness of the layout. Thirdly, the monograph is stylistically edited by a native speaker of English for grammaticality and clarity. Finally, the monograph is formatted into the form of a book and generally checked for all the details before being sent to the printing house.

The research monographs in the first collection cover various aspects concerning Southeast Asian countries; namely, politics, social issues, education, art, and architecture.

It is hoped that the *Research Monograph Series on Southeast Asia* will be beneficial to scholars, students and any general reader interested in Southeast Asia.

Amara Prasithrathsint
Series Editor

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I would like to express my gratitude to the Rockefeller Foundation, which provided financial support for my study via the “Weaving the Mekong into Southeast Asia” fellowship program. Without the support, my wish to study in Bangkok for an MA degree study would not have come true.

I was able to finish my research due to the encouragement and inspiration from my professors who gave valuable knowledge and widened my perspectives. Hence, I would like to show my deep gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Theera Nuchpiam, for his stimulating guidance and strong encouragement during my research, Dr. Montira Rato for her invaluable suggestions to sharpen my thesis arguments and Associate Professor Pornpen Hantrakool, for her constructive comments.

I would also like to express my deep gratitude to my key informants, especially those in Nakhon Phanom and Udon Thani, who not only helped me collect relevant data but also introduced me to valuable documents. Many thanks go to Mr. Vu Manh Hung in Udon, Mr. Dao Trong Ly in Nakhon Phanom, who kindly provided me with not only helpful information and access to other informants but also accommodation during my field study. Special thanks also go to Dr. Withaya Sucharithanarugse, who not only helped me receive the WMSEA fellowship but also widened my knowledge about Thai politics. Furthermore, I would like to thank Trinh Dieu Thin in Ha Noi who significantly widened my knowledge about Viet Kieu in Thailand as well as the relations between Thai people and Vietnamese.

I would like to show my gratitude to Dr. Sunait Chutintaranond, Director of Southeast Asian Studies Program and other lecturers in the program for their lectures which inspired me to undertake this research. Many thanks also go to all the staff at the Southeast Asian Studies Center, Chulalongkorn University for their administration assistance during my study.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my wife and my sister who always devote their lives for the success of my study.

Nguyen Anh Tai

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INDOCHINA WAR (1946-1954)*

ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to study the contributions of both the Vietnamese in Thailand and Thai people to the liberation movements in Vietnam during the First Indochina War and how the support from Thai people influenced the relations between Thai people and Vietnamese during this period. The study adopted a qualitative research method. The data was taken from documents and interviews. Moreover, case studies were carried out in Nakhon Phanom and Udon Thani, where there was a large Vietnamese community and where the patriotic movements took place.

The study finds that although the changes in Thai government from that of Prime Minister Pridi Banomyong (1946-1947) to the one led by Prime Minister P. Phibunsongkhram (1948-1954) had negative impacts on the Vietnamese community in Thailand, the Vietnamese community there still played a crucial role in supporting the war efforts in Vietnam. Moreover, it is undeniable that the patriotic movements of the Vietnamese received a lot of help from both Thai leaders, especially those in the Seri Thai group, and Thai people in the northeast.

* This research monograph was adapted from an M.A. thesis entitled "Thai-Vietnamese Relations during the First Indochina War (1946- 1954)." The thesis advisor was Teera Nuchpiam, Ph.D.

Furthermore, despite Phibun Songkhram's strict control of the Viet Kieu, relations between the Thai and Vietnamese were still good. This stemmed mainly from "Viet-Thai friendship" activities of the Vietnamese and also from Ho Chi Minh's effort to promote friendship between the two peoples during his stay in Siam in the late 1920s. This partly accounted for the love and protection of many generations of Siamese for Viet Kieu. Siam became a place that provided human forces and was also a bridge for Vietnamese revolution to penetrate Vietnam.

เหวียน อัน ต่าย

ความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างคนไทยกับคนเวียดนามช่วงสงครามอินโดจีนครั้งที่ 1 (1946-1954)**

บทคัดย่อ

วิทยานิพนธ์ฉบับนี้มุ่งศึกษาคุณภาพการของทั้งชาวเวียดนามและชาวไทยที่มีต่อขบวนการกู้อิสรภาพในเวียดนามระหว่างสงครามอินโดจีนครั้งที่ 1 รวมทั้งศึกษาว่า ความช่วยเหลือสนับสนุนจากชาวไทยมีอิทธิพลต่อความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างชาวไทยและชาวเวียดนามในช่วงนั้นอย่างไร การศึกษาอาศัยวิธีการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพเป็นหลัก ข้อมูลประกอบด้วยเอกสารและการสัมภาษณ์ นอกจากนี้ เพื่อให้ได้หลักฐานที่เกี่ยวข้องอย่างละเอียด ยังมีการศึกษากรณีของบุคคลต่างๆ ในนครพนมและอุดรธานี อันเป็นพื้นที่ที่มีชุมชนชาวเวียดนามขนาดใหญ่และเป็นพื้นที่ที่มีความเคลื่อนไหวในการกอบกู้เอกราช

การศึกษาเรื่องนี้พบว่า แม้ว่าการเปลี่ยนรัฐบาลจากนายกรัฐมนตรีปรีดี พนมยงค์ (1946-1947) มาเป็นรัฐบาลของจอมพล ป. พิบูลสงคราม (1948-1954) มีผลกระทบในทางลบต่อชุมชนชาว

** หนังสือรายงานวิจัยเล่มนี้ดัดแปลงมาจากวิทยานิพนธ์ปริญญาโทเรื่อง “ความสัมพันธ์ไทยเวียดนามช่วงสงครามอินโดจีนครั้งที่ 1 (1946-1954).” อาจารย์ที่ปรึกษาวิทยานิพนธ์ คือ ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์ ดร. วีระ นุชเปี่ยม

เวียดนามในประเทศไทย แต่ชุมชนชาวเวียดนามก็ยังมีบทบาทสำคัญในการสนับสนุนภารกิจการสงครามในเวียดนาม นอกจากนั้น ยังปฏิเสธไม่ได้ว่า ขบวนการกู้ชาติของชาวเวียดนามได้รับความช่วยเหลืออย่างมากจากผู้นำไทย โดยเฉพาะในกลุ่มเสรีไทย และประชาชนคนไทยในภาคตะวันออกเฉียงเหนือ ยิ่งไปกว่านั้น แม้ว่ารัฐบาลของจอมพล ป. พิบูลสงครามจะพยายามควบคุมชาวเวียดนามในประเทศไทยอย่างเข้มงวด แต่ความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างคนไทยและคนเวียดนามก็ยังเป็นความสัมพันธ์ที่ดี นี่เป็นผลที่มาจากกิจกรรมการสร้าง “มิตรภาพเวียดนาม-ไทย” ของชาวเวียดนามและความพยายามของโฮ จิ มินห์ ในการส่งเสริมมิตรภาพดังกล่าวในช่วงที่เขาพำนักอยู่ในสยาม ในช่วงทศวรรษ 1920 สิ่งนี้เองที่ช่วยอธิบายความรักและการปกป้องที่คนไทยหลายชั่วอายุคนได้ให้แก่ชาวเวียดนามในประเทศไทย สยามเป็นดินแดนที่ให้กองกำลังที่ไปรบและเป็นสะพานเชื่อมที่ทำให้การปฏิบัติเวียดนามเข้าไปสู่เวียดนามได้

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Vietnamese history is replete with wars and patriotic activities. It bears witness to the ups and downs of patriotic activities in the process of liberation and unification. The patriotic activities of the Vietnamese in Vietnam as well as in other countries, particularly Thailand, played a crucial role in the Vietnamese victory over French colonialists. In fact, the role of the Vietnamese in Thailand was noticeable in terms of their contributions to the liberation process in Vietnam, especially during the First Indochina War from 1946 to 1954.

The latest flow of Vietnamese migrants to Thailand, which occurred in March 1946, consisted of those fleeing aggression by the French armed forces in the provinces along the Mekong River in Laos. In order to escape hardships in their home country, some of these Vietnamese settled down in Laos for quite some time, while others were sent to work for the French administration in this country (Thanyathip Sripana, 2006: 3). By March 1946, the French had concentrated their forces and successively launched strong attacks in order to seize these border towns. On March 21 1946, the French used massive air bombings and tanks to seize Thakhek and killed a large number of the local

people. As a result, the Vietnamese community in these towns had no alternative: they had to migrate to northeastern Thailand, leaving behind their assets and being unable to forget their grief, fears and memories of their dear martyrs. The migration was completed in a week, with about 70,000 Vietnamese being temporarily resettled in districts and provinces in northeastern Thailand, including Tha Bo, Nong Khai, Loei, Nakhon Phanom, Mukdahan, and That Phanom (Trinh Dieu Thin, 2002: 5).¹ The new migrants were mostly manual workers, handicraft artisans, small traders, and a small number of them were farmers.

In the early days after their arrival, the migrants faced numerous difficulties—materials as well as emotional—because they could not take with them most of their belongings. They had left behind their houses, gardens, shops, crops, and merchandise (Trinh Dieu Thin, 2003: 151). Fortunately, these people received assistance from the Thai government and local people in the form of food, accommodation, jobs, and land. After they had stabilized their lives, the Vietnamese people who lived in these communities organized patriotic activities to support the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) in its fight against the French. The Vietnamese in Thailand served as a major source of support in the form of money, soldiers, and weapons

¹ However, Chan Ansuchote (1960) stated in *Vietnamese Refugees in Thailand: A Case Study in Decision-Making* that around 50,000 Vietnamese fled to the northeast of Thailand from Laos.

for the war. The Vietnamese in Thailand made crucial contributions to the liberation of French rule in Vietnam.

Vietnamese-Thai relations can be traced far into the past. Modern history has witnessed the rise and fall, and warmth and coldness, in both state-to-state and people-to-people relationships between Vietnam and Thailand. The Vietnamese in Thailand have had strong impact on shaping bilateral relations between the two countries. Before and during the early period of the First Indochina War, Thailand was considered an important destination for the Vietnamese in setting up supply networks for the independence struggle against the French. Thanks to these networks, essential weapons, medicine, and other materials were able to reach Vietnam and support the revolutionary activities, which led to the Vietnamese victory over the French.

From 1946 to 1947, with the support of Prime Minister Pridi Banomyong and his Seri Thai movement, the Vietnamese in Thailand had a good period in terms of developing the revolutionary networks for the purpose of liberating Vietnam. The Vietnamese received sympathy not only from common Thai people but also from the Thai government. They were offered opportunities to earn a living by doing construction work, farming, and working for small businesses, among other activities. The Thai people's dislike of the French, which resulted from the loss of their territories to the French during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, might have accounted for this support. However, the close

relationship between the Thais and Vietnamese people might also have created sympathy among Thais to the Vietnamese struggle for independence. Therefore, the Vietnamese during this period showed deep gratitude to the Thai people for their support.

However, relations between the two countries became bitter when the Thai military regime came to power after the 1947 coup. From 1951 to 1954, the patriotic activities of the Vietnamese in Thailand were closely controlled. Thai Prime Minister Field Marshall P. Phibunsongkhram recognized the Bao Dai regime in the south of Vietnam, which was supported by the French; this clearly reversed Thai policy towards Indochina. Thailand's foreign policy in this period stemmed mainly from the United States' containment doctrine in Asia as well as concern about the victory of communism in China in October 1949. Indeed, in reversing its policy, Thailand became a front-line state in preventing the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. During this period, the Vietnamese in Thailand faced bad living condition, and their movements were limited to certain locations in a number of provinces in the northeast. Furthermore, hundreds of men were exiled to the southern provinces of Thailand. They did not have legal status that would provide them with access to the full rights of normal Thai citizens.

In summary, the role of the Vietnamese in contributing to the struggle for independence by establishing supply networks was essential. Moreover, during this period, support from the Thai people for the revolutionary networks was also very important.

Up to the present, quite a number of studies have been undertaken on the Vietnamese in Thailand, but our understanding of their contributions to the First Indochina War, as well as the support of Thai people for their war effort, is still limited, especially in Vietnamese versions. Besides, how the support from Thai people shaped Thai-Vietnamese relations is also worth studying.

1.2 Literature Review

As has been indicated, there exists, though not in substantial numbers, literature concerning the Vietnamese in Thailand and Thai-Vietnamese relations. Though not directly relevant to my research here, this literature provides a crucial background for understanding the contributions of both the Vietnamese in Thailand and Thai people to the First Indochina War and their impact on Thai-Vietnamese relations during the war, as well as in later periods. Most notably, however, there are valuable historical documents in the form of records of those who actually participated in the national struggle for independence.

1.2.1 Vietnamese Researchers and Scholars

Given the sensitivity of the “Vietnamese refugee problem” in Thailand and the strained Thai-Vietnamese relationship during the Cold War, not much has been written about the Vietnamese refugees in this country or on Thai-Vietnamese relations. On the Vietnamese side, the literature on

Viet Kieu in Thailand and Thai-Vietnamese relations is mostly in the form of academic works and historical documents.

One eminent Vietnamese scholar specializing in Viet Kieu and Thai-Vietnamese relations is Trinh Dieu Thin, a senior researcher at the Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, National Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities, Hanoi, Vietnam. In “Formation of the Vietnamese Community in Thailand” presented by Trinh Dieu Thin (2003) in a workshop marking the “Twenty-Five Years of Thai-Vietnamese Relationship,” she provided a clear history of Vietnamese migration to Siam/Thailand and touched briefly on the nationalist movements of Viet Kieu in Thailand as well as the assistance from the Pridi Banomyong government and the restrictive policy applied by the government towards the Viet Kieu. In another paper: “The Vietnamese Communities in Northeast Thailand: A Century of Attachment with Isan,” Trinh Dieu Thin (2002) touched upon the changes in Thai policies towards Viet Kieu and their contributions to the economic development of this region.

Those scholars who had joined the nationalist movements in Thailand recorded their activities as historical documents. The most notable one is *National Salvation Campaign of the Viet Kieu in Thailand (Cuoc Van Dong Cuu Quoc Cua Viet Kieu o Thai Lan)* by Le Manh Trinh (1961). Furthermore, other historical documents are also noticeable in terms of the revolutionary activities and the contributions of Viet Kieu in Thailand and Laos such

as *Memory of Overseas Vietnamese (Hoi Ky Viet Kieu)* by Le Quoc San (1989a), *Viet Kieu in Laos and Thailand with the Motherland (Viet Kieu Lao-Thai Voi Que Huong)* by Tran Dinh Luu (2009). Moreover, in *Overseas Battalion IV (Chi Doi Hai Ngoai IV: Chi Doi Tran Phu)* by Le Quoc San (1989b), and *Beloved Children (Nhung Dua Con Than Yeu)* by Dao Manh Due (1997), the two authors recount the organization of Viet Kieu soldiers in Thailand and how they were sent back to Vietnam to fight the French colonialists and gained glorious feat of arms.

1.2.2 Thai and Foreign Researchers and Scholars

Works on the First Indochina War by Thai as well as other foreign scholars mainly focus on the period from 1950 to 1954. Their interest stemmed from the increasing concern about the perceived communist threat from China and DRV (Democratic Republic of Vietnam). They completed several studies on Viet Kieu as well as Thai policy towards them and Thai-Vietnamese relations. However, those works have different approaches in terms of ideology. Those scholars, who were influenced by the United States containment doctrine and propaganda, described the Vietnamese refugees as troublemakers, communist insurgents, and threats to Thai national security.

One of the most prominent books to describe the situation of the Vietnamese refugees is *The*

Vietnamese Refugees in Thailand: A Case Study in Decision-Making by Chan Ansuchote (1960). Furthermore, there are many other books and journals that give a clear picture of the anti-communist ideology. These include *The Vietnamese in Thailand—A Historical Perspective* by Poole (1970); “Thailand’s Vietnamese Minority” by Poole (1967); “Thailand’s Vietnamese: peace-loving and neutral or a communist fifth column?” by Suthichai Yoon (1970); and “Thailand’s Bureaucracy and the Threat of Communist Subversion” by King (1954).

Unlike anti-communist scholars, the moderate ones mainly focus on the nationalist movement led by Viet Minh in Thailand. Using a different approach, Flood (1977) described the situations of the Vietnamese refugees in Thailand in “The Vietnamese Refugees in Thailand: Minority Manipulation in Counterinsurgency.” He pointed out how these people suffered from the hardship inflicted upon them by the Thai government. This scholar also considered the Vietnamese refugees in Thailand as “scapegoats” of anti-communist policy, which was influenced by American propaganda against communist operations in Thailand. In *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution, 1885-1954*, Goscha (1999) also provides detailed information on the nationalist movements organized by the Vietnamese in Thailand in order to fight French colonialism.

The period from 1946 to 1954 witnessed the ups and downs of Vietnamese nationalist movements in Thailand. The change from a civilian government

headed by Pridi Banomyong to a military one headed by Field Marshal P. Phibunsongkhram had strong impact on these people, because the policies of the two governments adopted towards them were different.

Under the civilian government led by Pridi Banomyong, the Vietnamese in Thailand had freedom to do what they wanted and were supported by the government. In *Thailand: Economy and Politics*, Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker (1995) point out that Pridi Banomyong allowed Vietnamese nationalists to operate in Thailand and assisted them to buy arms and supported a short-lived plan for a "League of Southeast Asia." Thanyathip Sripana and Trinh Dieu Thin (2006), in *Viet Kieu in Thailand and Thai-Vietnamese relationship*, refer to the support from the Pridi Banomyong government to the Vietnamese nationalist movements. In *Thailand and the Southeast Asian networks of the Vietnamese Revolution, 1885-1954*, Goscha (1999) also mentions the assistance from Pridi Banomyong and his Seri Thai leaders such as Tiang Sirikhan and Thong-In Phuripat to the Vietnamese nationalist movement, and so does Sorasak Ngamcachonkulkid (2005) in *The Seri Thai Movement: The First Alliance against Military Authoritarianism in Modern Thai History*.

When they came to power in 1948, the Vietnamese in Thailand were considered communists and a threat to Thai national security. In *The US and Military Government in Thailand 1947-1958 Vol.1.*, Fineman (1993) stated that, from 1948-1949, P. Phibunsongkhram showed his hesitation to suppress

the communist movement in Thailand due to the increasing concern about the complete victory of communism in China in 1949. However, according to Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker (2005) in *A History of Thailand*, with the backup of the United States, Thailand completely changed its policy towards communists in 1950 and decided to recognize the Bao Dai government as a result of the pressure from the United States. There was also the influence of American propaganda about the spread of communist threats from China and Vietnam to Thailand, according to Mozingo (1967) in “Containment in Asia.”

From 1950 onwards, the P. Phibunsongkhram government imposed strict controls on the Vietnamese refugees. Some works touch upon the Thai government’s stricter policies that stemmed from changes in Thai politics during this period. Kobkua’s (1995) *Thailand’s Durable Premier: P. Phibunsongkhram through Three Decades 1932-1957* and Liang Chi Shad’s (1977) “Thailand’s Foreign Policy: An Analysis of its Evolution since World War II” provide detailed information on the change in Thai foreign relations in different periods from 1938 to 1957. Because of the change in policy towards the Vietnamese refugees in Thailand, these people faced worsening situations. Boonsanong Punyodyana (1974) recounts the hardships of Vietnamese refugees in Thailand during this period in “Minority Group and Minority Class: The Oppressed and Oppressor in Thai Social Structure.” In addition, Thailand moved more and more into the

western camp, which was shown in its decision to be under US patronage in SEATO in 1954. Thailand thus became a front line state to counter communism in Southeast Asia, according to Nuechterlein (1965) in *Thailand and the Struggle for Southeast Asia*.

The contributions of the Vietnamese nationalist movements in Thailand to the war efforts were also remarkable. These contributions have been touched upon in academic works mentioned so far. Goscha (1999), for example, mentions the contributions of Viet Kieu in Thailand in terms of weapons, soldiers, medicine and other necessities in his book *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution, 1885-1954*. However, the contributions of Viet Kieu in Thailand would become better known mainly through the memoirs of the contemporary Viet Kieu. After interviewing some contemporary Viet Kieu in Nakhon Phanom, Udon Thani and Bangkok about their contributions during the First Indochina War, I found that although Viet Kieu played an important role in the supply networks to the nationalist movement for several decades, their contributions have not been fully and systematically recorded in academic works. As a result, not many Vietnamese in Vietnam, including this researcher, know about their contributions to the First Indochina War.

In sum, there has been little academic literature dealing directly, comprehensively and systematically with the topic. This study, therefore, will hopefully contribute to our knowledge as well as provide further understanding of the contributions of

both Thai people and Viet Kieu to the liberation movements in Vietnam as well as Thai-Vietnamese relations during the First Indochina War.

1.3 Objectives

The aims of the study are as follows.

1) To explore Thai people's support for the Vietnamese in Thailand during the First Indochina War;

2) To investigate the contributions of the Vietnamese in Thailand to the Vietminh during this period; and

3) To assess the implications of Thai support for the Vietminh for Thai-Vietnamese relations during this period and beyond, particularly how Thai support for this struggle shaped or influenced Thai-Vietnamese relations during that time and thereafter.

1.4 Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research method. Research techniques consisted of documentary research and interviews. Furthermore, to collect relevant field data, case studies were carried out in Nakhon Phanom and Udon Thani, where there was a large Vietnamese community and where Vietnamese patriotic activities took place.

The documentary research consisted primarily in reviewing relevant literature and documents in both Vietnamese and English languages. In addition, regarding the support of Thai

people for the Vietnamese in Thailand during this period as well as the contributions of the Vietnamese to the war effort, newspapers and academic articles such as *Bangkok Post*, *The Nations*, *Asian Survey*, etc, which were published during the Cold War, were also used for analysis.

Beside the documentary research, in-depth interviews were carried out as the main source of data. In addition to interviewing key informants in the northeastern provinces, such as Nakhon Phanom and Udon Thani, interviews were also carried out in Bangkok and in Ha Noi with scholars and researchers to collect necessary data from both sides.

The focus of the case studies in Nakhon Phanom and Udon Thani was on the contributions of Thais and Viet Kieu to the war, Thai policies towards Viet Kieu during this period, and how these activities shaped the relations at the people-to-people level.

1.5 Scope of the Study

Thai-Vietnamese relations are a complicated issue. The relationship has been shaped by history, politics and ideology. Thus, it is impossible to cover all aspects of only one historical period in Thai-Vietnamese relations in a single study. Therefore, this study on the contributions of both Viet Kieu and Thai people to the First Indochina War was restricted to the war period itself; that is from 1946 to 1954. Apart from the patriotic activities of the Vietnamese in Thailand, and how they were supported by the Thai people, the study also highlighted the change in

the country's policies towards Indochina and the Vietnamese community during the 1946 to 1954 period. The documents used in this study are in both Vietnamese and English.

The main secondary sources on which this study has relied for background to the Vietnamese patriotic activities in Thailand and other relevant themes include *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution, 1885-1954* by Goscha (1999) and *Viet Kieu in Thailand and Thai-Vietnamese Relationship* by Thanyathip Sripana and Trinh Dieu Thin (2006).

Furthermore, for Thailand's policy towards the Vietnamese refugees during the First Indochina War, this study has drawn on a thesis, *The Vietnamese Refugees in Thailand: A Case Study in Decision-Making* by Chan Ansuchote (1960); *The Vietnamese in Thailand: A Historical Perspective* by Poole (1970); and *Thailand's Durable Premier: P. Phibunsongkhram through three Decades 1932-1957* by Kobkua (1995). Finally, for Thai-Vietnamese friendship on the people-to-people level, the study has drawn on interviews with contemporary Viet Kieu in Udon Thani and Nakhon Phanom, as well as in Bangkok.

The term "Viet Kieu" used in this study refers to overseas Vietnamese who migrated to Thailand at the time of the Thakhek incident in 1946. Moreover, the term "Vietnamese" only refers to the ethnic "Viet" or "Kinh" who account for the majority of the Vietnamese population. As a result, those from

ethnic groups in Vietnam who also migrated to Thailand will not be covered in the study.

At the people-to-people level, the term “relations” covers the relationship between the Thais and the Vietnamese in Thailand, especially Viet Kieu during the First Indochina War from 1946 to 1954.

So, this thesis emphasizes the relations between Viet Kieu (overseas Vietnamese who migrated to the northeast of Thailand during the Thakhek incident in 1946) and Thai people in the northeast of Thailand, the assistance from the Prime Minister Pridi Banomyong and his Seri Thai leaders as well as from Thai people in the northeast, especially in Nakhon Phanom and Udon Thani.

1.6 Limitations

In undertaking this study, the researcher encountered several limitations. Firstly, the topic remains rather sensitive in terms of Thai-Vietnamese relations during the First Indochina War. It is still controversial in terms of the roles of Viet Kieu during the war. While Vietnamese scholars considered Viet Kieu as contributors or patriots, some Thais and foreigners considered them as spies, troublemakers or communist insurgents. So, as a Vietnamese, the researcher did his best to balance the argument by comparing different sources of data even through interviews from both researchers and scholars in Vietnam and Thailand.

Secondly, the First Indochina War took place decades ago; therefore, it is hard to find Viet Kieu

and especially Thai people from that generation for in-depth interviews, particularly in Nakhon Phanom. Moreover, those who participated in the First Indochina War are very old now. As a result, their health does not allow them to remember the events clearly and systematically, and this made it difficult for the researcher to collect as much essential data as he wished for analysis.

Thirdly, the study requires a deep and broad knowledge about not only Viet Kieu in Thailand but also Thai history, political developments and foreign policy. Hence, the researcher actually needed more time and efforts to master the knowledge in order to gain better understanding of the subject.

Fourthly, due to Thai language limitations, the researcher found it difficult to gain access to Thai documents and important Thai key informants in the northeast of Thailand, especially in Nakhon Phanom. Moreover, the limited access to Vietnamese sources as well as senior officials of Vietnamese government agencies may affect the objectivity of the research.

Finally, with limited research time and financial support, the researcher also shortened the field trip and limited the field trip areas. Therefore, the study cannot avoid some shortcomings, and certain simplifications are to be expected in the study.

2

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE
VIETNAMESE MIGRATION TO THAILAND****2.1 Historical Background of the First
Indochina War (1946-1954)**

The First Indochina War has been known by various names: the French Indochina War, the Anti-French War, the Franco-Vietnamese War, the Franco-Viet Minh War, or simply the Indochina War. The French people called it, especially during the later stages of the war, the Dirty War; and it is known in Vietnam as the French War. The war broke out in French Indochina on December 19, 1946, and lasted until August 1, 1954.

Following the Japanese capitulation to the allies in August 1945, Viet Minh forces took the opportunity to occupy northern Vietnam and founded the independent Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) on September 2, 1945 with the capital at Hanoi. Afterwards, liberated French troops not only reoccupied territory in the south but also threatened to invade the north. After several negotiations, the French and the DRV reached an agreement under which the French government secured the right to post a military presence in the north in return for recognizing the DRV as a free state within a French federation. Both the French and the DRV were unhappy with the arrangement. However, after French

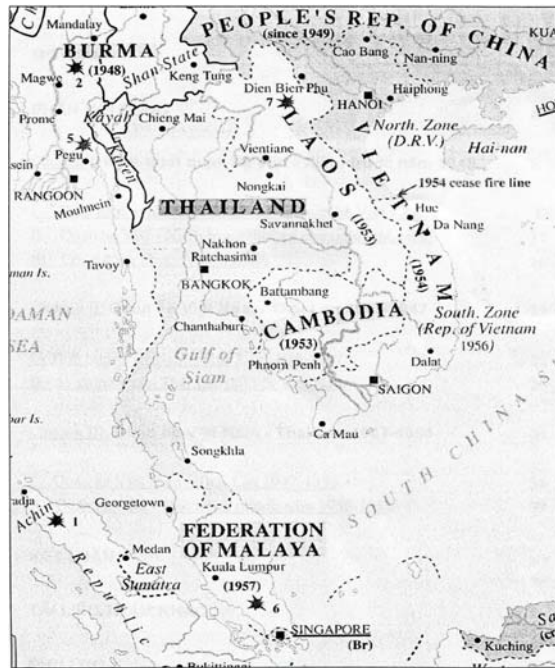


Figure 1: Southeast Asian countries (1945–1954)
Source: Nguyen Hong Dung (1998)

troops arrived in the north, talks on the future of Vietnamese independence continued because the French were afraid that they would spark conflicts with both the DRV and Chinese forces in Hanoi (the Chinese Nationalist Chinese forces were there to disarm Japanese troops). On December 19, 1946, after lengthy negotiations failed to reach a compromise, Viet Minh units attacked French installations throughout northern Vietnam. This event marked the outburst of the First Indochina War (1946-1954) in Vietnam.

According to Stuart-Fox (1997: 65), the French tried to reestablish its colonial rule not only in Vietnam after the Second World War but also in Cambodia and Laos. Two events that paved the way for the French re-conquest of Laos were: 1) the Modus Vivendi agreed between Ho Chi Minh and the French government on March 6, 1946, which prolonged the suspension of hostilities in Vietnam and left the Lao Issara exposed; and 2) agreement on the withdrawal of Chinese forces. Lao Issara and Vietnamese paramilitary forces abandoned Savannakhet, but at Thakhek, a defiant Suphanuvong commanding a combined Lao-Viet force was determined to make a stand. The French assault came on March 21, backed by armored cars, artillery and aircraft against the lightly armed Lao and Vietnamese. Within a few hours it was all over. The defenders suffered more than a thousand casualties; many civilians were shot and drowned as they attempted to cross the Mekong River into Thailand.² This resulted in the exoduses of both Lao and Vietnamese to the northeast of Thailand to take refuge there. As a result, those people had to leave their hometowns to make new lives in Thailand; they formed their communities and organized their nationalist movements to fight the French colonialists.

The communist victory in China in 1949 helped strengthen the Viet Minh. Through Chinese

² According to Nguyen Thanh Van et al (2001), the numbers of people slaughtered by French colonialists in the Thakhek incident were three thousand people.

military assistance, Viet Minh forces grew rapidly and from 1950 began to go on the offensive. At the same time, the French supported former Emperor Bao Dai as puppet ruler of an autonomous State of Vietnam in order to obtain the support of both the US and the local population. Bao Dai showed his willingness to cooperate with France to defeat communist North Vietnam, which was led by the Viet Minh. In 1950, underestimating the power of the French, Vo Nguyen Giap, Chief Commander of the Vietnam People's Army (PVA), prepared a major campaign to seize the Red River Delta. However, the French, now supported by the US with new weapons, defeated the Viet Minh forces and drove them back into the mountains.

For the remainder of the war, Viet Minh strategists concentrated on attacking vulnerable French outposts throughout Indochina, while avoiding direct confrontation on an open battlefield. Ho Chi Minh pinned his hopes on the French public growing weary of the war and on increasing support of the Vietnamese people for his movement, because the DRV lacked the military strength to defeat the French. In early 1954, France agreed to open negotiations on a cease-fire later that spring in Geneva, Switzerland, because the conflict between the two sides was at a stalemate. Ho Chi Minh and his colleagues took the opportunity to attack an isolated French military post at Dien Bien Phu in mountainous northwest Vietnam with the hope that a decisive victory on the battlefield would strengthen their position when peace talks opened. As a consequence, Dien Bien Phu fell to Viet Minh forces

on May 7 just one day before the opening of talks at Geneva.³

The victory at Dien Bien Phu strengthened the Viet Minh position at Geneva, whereas the negotiating leverage of the French was weakened by their humiliating defeat. After several rounds of discussions, French negotiators agreed to withdraw their troops from Vietnam. Both sides reached an agreement known as the Geneva Accords, which temporarily divided Vietnam into two separate regroupment zones at the 17th parallel, roughly representing the positions of the two sides in the war. The supporters of the DRV were to assemble in the north, and non-Communist elements were to unite under Bao Dai in the south. The country was to be reunified after national elections, scheduled for July 1956.⁴ The accords also established independent non-Communist governments in neighboring Laos and Cambodia. Under pressure from China and the Soviet Union, the DRV reluctantly accepted a compromise peace to end the First Indochina War.

This brief account of the First Indochina War provides a background to the patriotic activities of Vietnamese in Thailand throughout the war. We will first look at how these people came to Thailand and how their community there served as a basis for such activities.

³ Source: http://wapedia.mobi/en/First_Indochina_War#1

⁴ Source: http://wapedia.mobi/en/First_Indochina_War#1

2.2 Migration of the Vietnamese Community into Thailand

2.2.1 Overview

There is evidence of the Vietnamese presence in Siam, as Thailand was then called, in as early as the late 17th century; and from then on many waves of migrants came to this country. The Vietnamese migration into Siam stemmed from several factors, such as religious persecution by the Nguyen court, French suppression, as well as hardships and suffering from poverty. In addition, during the reign of King Rama III, the Vietnamese were forcibly moved from Cambodia as prisoners of war following the war between Vietnam and Siam on Cambodia in 1832-1846. From the late 19th to mid 20th centuries, Vietnamese nationalists moved to present-day northeastern Thailand and used it as a base for their resistance to the French in Laos and Vietnam. During World War II, famine and poverty also forced a number of Vietnamese to leave their country (Thanyathip Sripana, 2006: 2).

In the early periods, travelling by sea was the most convenient way, and the Vietnamese migrants, therefore, settled in the coastal provinces of Siam, most notably Chanthaburi on the east coast of the country. Afterwards, some groups went as far as the western border areas, like Kanchanaburi Province. At the turn of the 19th century sporadic migrations took place with migrants coming from central Vietnam. They crossed the Vietnamese mountain range, then

traveled through Laos and from there crossed the Mekong River to become the first Vietnamese migrant groups to settle down in the northeast of Thailand (Trinh Dieu Thin, 2002: 2). Thereafter, in 1946, there was the biggest wave of Vietnamese migrants escaping the French suppression in the border provinces of Laos to the northeast of Thailand. This was a special wave of migration that stemmed from the fighting between French colonialists and the national liberation forces in Indochina. This wave of migration also formed the biggest Vietnamese community in the northeast and also served as a base for the Vietnamese nationalist movement in their fight against the French.

In the aftermath of World War II, Thailand faced many economic difficulties. At this time, the Thai government led by Pridi Banomyong tried to overcome the problems by introducing economic reforms. In spite of economic difficulties, the Pridi Banomyong government showed its generosity in assisting the Vietnamese in the early days in the northeast. The Pridi Banomyong government provided good conditions for the Vietnamese to earn a living in the northeast in particular and in Thailand in general. Thanks to support from both the Thai government and the various strata of the Thai people, the Vietnamese community could feel at home and regain strength to overcome these difficult years. As a consequence, the Vietnamese felt confident in finding ways to earn a living and support the nationalist movements in order to liberate Vietnam from French colonialists.



Figure 2: Vietnamese emigration to Siam (17th – 20th Centuries)
 Source: Goscha (1999)

2.2.2 The First Group: Vietnamese Migrants in Ayutthaya

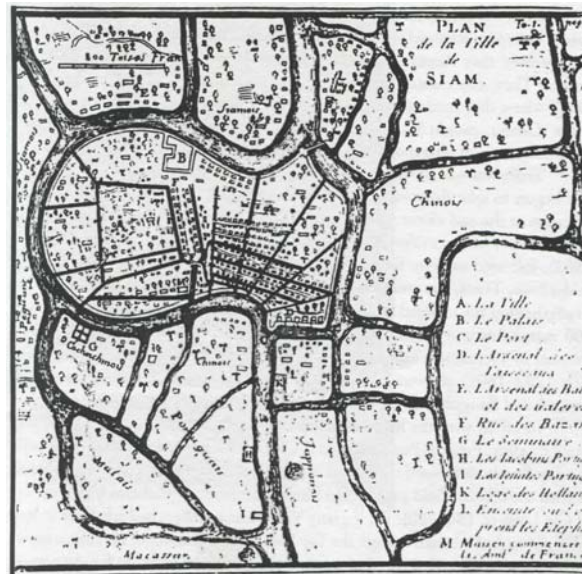


Figure 3: Ayutthaya and the Cochin-Chinese Quarter, 17th Century
Source: Goscha (1999)

As has been indicated, the presence of Vietnamese in Siam dates back to the late 17th century, which was during the Ayutthaya period. They were present among the foreigners' villages in the city. One piece of evidence to prove the presence of the Vietnamese community was a map of Ayutthaya published in 1691 by a Frenchman named Simon de La Loubere. When French missionaries arrived in Ayutthaya in 1662, they found around 100

Cochin-Chinese families and were called in French “Cochinchine” (Goscha, 1999: 14).

Goscha has also stated that these Vietnamese traveled from the south of Vietnam by sea to the Gulf of Siam and then to Ayutthaya. Most of these Vietnamese made their living as small-scale traders, transporting goods between southern central Vietnam and Siam. Others served as interpreters for European traders, worked as their slaves, navigated ships for the Siamese royal navy, or served in various local courts as messengers and spies.

The Vietnamese migration of this period resulted from the violent conflict between the “Trinh” and “Nguyen” families, as well as the suppression by Vietnam’s Royal Court of Vietnamese Catholics led by Portuguese priests. The Nguyen lords could not fight the Trinh in the north because of its narrow lands, sparse population and lack of natural resources. As a consequence, the Nguyen lords expanded to the south with a “March Southward” policy to strengthen their war potential. Moreover, the Nguyen court also applied serious policies towards Christianity and ruthlessly suppressed its Vietnamese followers. This situation forced a number of Vietnamese to flee, via the southern part of Vietnam and the Gulf of Siam, to Ayutthaya. Goscha (1999) has added that the “Cochinchinois” in Ayutthaya continued to grow in number especially during the reign of King Narai (1656-1688). According to Trinh Dieu Thin (2003), these were Christians and peasants with important sideline expertise especially in navigation, fishing

and processing of aquatic products, and handicrafts. These skills would significantly contribute to the development of fishing and handicraft production in Siamese society.

The war with Burma during the second half of the 17th century resulted in Ayutthaya's serious shortage of material and human resources. Therefore, the Vietnamese migrants were welcomed to assume many occupations in the kingdom in order to meet those demands. Trinh Dieu Thin (2003: 139) has pointed out that the Vietnamese migrants enjoyed good living condition and, therefore, made great contributions to the development of Siamese society, especially under the reign of King Narai. The Vietnamese community in Siam during this period contributed their expertise to the prosperity of the Siamese Kingdom and helped develop its good relations with the court of the Nguyen lords in southern Vietnam.

2.2.3 The Second Group: From Nguyen Anh's Approach to Siam to the Early Bangkok Period

According to Goscha (1999: 16), the Vietnamese migration also stemmed from civil unrest during Tay Son Rebellion (1771-1802). This period witnessed Nguyen Anh's escape to Siam to seek help in fighting the Tay Son. Thus, most of the migrants from this period were southern sailors and soldiers who followed Nguyen Anh to Siam in the mid-1780s. Notably, among them were 300

mandarins and officers, bringing the total number of Vietnamese exiles in Siam to around 1,000. Thanks to the help of the Siamese King, Nguyen Anh could consolidate his forces and strengthen his regional and international alliances. The Siamese King Rama I (1782-1809) allowed Nguyen Anh and his men to live in areas such as Samsen and Bang Pho, which today are parts of Bangkok.

Nguyen Anh defeated the Tay Son in 1802 and became Emperor Gia Long (1802-1820) and continued to build good relations with Siam. Although many Vietnamese officers had left Siam to fight on Nguyen Anh's behalf against the Tay Son, a large number of his troops stayed. Many of them married Siamese women and took jobs such as small traders, police officers, doctors, lawyers and bureaucrats working for the Siamese monarch. Owing to the good relations between the two kingdoms, the Vietnamese community in Siam enjoyed stable and good living conditions. Hence, many of the offspring of these immigrants were assimilated into Siamese society through intermarriage (Goscha, 1999: 16).

Moreover, they also played an important role in developing the Siamese kingdom's construction of fine buildings. Furthermore, the Vietnamese took part in the conflicts between Siam and Burma by serving in the Siamese army along the western border of Thailand. Trinh Dieu Thin (2003: 143) cited Thai historical records to show that thousands of Nguyen Anh's soldiers chose to stay in Siam to

work for the Siamese army instead of returning to Vietnam to fight the Tay Son.

However, the relationship between Siam and Vietnam became bitter under the reign of King Rama III. In competing for power and influence over Cambodia, the two kingdoms fought a 15-year war that destroyed the good relations between them. Finally, the war ended with the 1857 treaty marking a new period in the relationship between the two kingdoms. During the war, a large number of Vietnamese residing in Cambodia, particularly in Battambang and Siem Riep provinces, were arrested and taken to Siam as war trophies and employed in construction work. These Vietnamese people settled mainly in the eastern and northeastern parts of the kingdom, such as Aranyaprathet, Surin, and other provinces in those areas.

Unlike his predecessor, King Rama IV adopted a foreign policy to welcome all Vietnamese migrants irrespective of their circumstances, their coming by sea or by land through Laos or Cambodia, their being of southern Vietnamese or northern Vietnamese origin. Due to the ruthless suppression of Catholics by Emperor Tu Duc, about 4,000 migrants came to Thailand via Laos during this period. They usually stayed in provinces bordering or near the Mekong River, such as Nakhon Phanom and Sakon Nakhon. Most of them were Catholics and Ta Rae village today has a church that serves the community, which mainly engages in trade rather than agriculture (Trinh Dieu Thin, 2003: 144).

According to Trinh, in addition to Catholics, the Vietnamese migrants to Thailand in this period were also Buddhists who built no less than 20 Buddhist temples all over Siam. For some time there were Vietnamese Buddhist monks in these monasteries.

To summarize, no matter who they were, the Vietnamese played an important role in Siamese society. They assimilated with the customs, culture and laws of the host country and became a bridge connecting the two kingdoms. They helped develop the Siamese kingdom as well as Vietnam.

2.2.4 The Third Group: From the End of the 19th to the Beginning of the 20th Century

A large number of Vietnamese migrated to Siam under the reign of King Rama V from the late 19th to early 20th centuries as a result of France's ruthless rule, famine and poverty in Vietnam (Thanyathip Sripana, 2006: 2). To fight the French, Vietnamese scholars carried out "a nation-wide struggle for national salvation," beginning with the "Save the King Movement" (Can Vuong) led by Ton That Thuyet, then the "Study in the East" movement (Dong Du) and the "Tonkin Free School" movement (Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc) led by Phan Boi Chau and Phan Chu Trinh, respectively. The French suppressed these movements cruelly and forced a number of these patriots and their followers to flee to Siam (Trinh Dieu Thin, 2002: 4). The failure of these movements compelled the Vietnamese patriots to seek new destinations for their future nationalist

movements. At that time, Siam, which was still independent, was an ideal place for their patriotic activities. As a result, patriots such as Phan Boi Chau, Dang Thuc Hua, Dang Huynh Anh, and many others started to establish links between the Vietnamese and Thais in Siam to prepare for their struggle against the French.

That was the last group of migrants classified as “old Vietnamese migrants” in keeping with the immigration regulations laid down by the Thai government in 1945. Moreover, they integrated into Thai society by accepting Thai customs, habits, and culture. However, whether they were assimilated completely was still a debatable issue. Goscha (1999) has concluded that all of these late 17th, 18th, and 19th century Vietnamese émigrés and their descendants constituted what 20th century Vietnamese would call the “old Vietnamese residents” (Viet Kieu Cu) or the “*yuan kao*” in Siamese, suggesting that many of them had actually been assimilated into Siamese society by the turn of the century. The following map shows the residential areas of the old Vietnamese in Thailand.



Figure 4: Main concentrations of “old Vietnamese” in Thailand
Source: Poole (1970)

Table 1: Main concentrations of "Old Vietnamese" in Thailand

Village (<i>muban</i>), township (<i>tambol</i>), or municipality	Popula- tion	District	Province	No. of old Viet- namese
1. Chiang Mai	65,736	Chiang Mai	Chiang Mai	50
2. Si Chiang Mai	7,957	Si Chiang Mai	Nong Khai	90
3. Tha Bo	13,096	Tha Bo	Nong Khai	298
4. Nong Khai	21,120	Nong Khai	Nong Khai	60
5. Phon Phisai	7,825	Phon Phisai	Nong Khai	60
6. Bung Kan	8,412	Bung Kan	Nong Khai	25
7. Udon Thani	30,884	Udon Thani	Udon Thani	200
8. Thare	5,192	Sakhon Nakhon	Sakhon Nakhon	2,000
9. Sakhon Nakhon	15,997	Sakhon Nakhon	Sakhon Nakhon	150
10. Nong Saeng	14,799	Nakhon Phanom	Nakhon Phanom	1,200
11. Khon Kaen	7,402	Khon Kaen	Khon Kaen	40
12. Ubon		Ubon	Ubon	
Ratchathani	27,222	Ratchathani	Ratchathani	650
13. Nakhon Sawan	34,947	Nakhon Sawan	Nakhon Sawan	500
14. Nakhon		Nakhon	Nakhon	
Ratchasima	42,218	Ratchasima	Ratchasima	15
(Korat)			(Korat)	
15. Bangkok	2,357	Ban Mi	Lop Buri	397
16. Ban Phaeng	2,652	Phrom Buri	Sing Buri	1,040
17. Ban Nakhok	2,252	Phak Hai	Ayutthaya	334
18. Chaochet	3,627	Sena	Ayutthaya	790
19. Ayutthaya	32,368	Ayutthaya	Ayutthaya	500
20. Bang Pa-in	2,797	Bang Pa-in	Ayutthaya	850
21. Song Pi Nong	6,660	Song Pi Nong	Suphan Buri	935
22. Koh (Koh Yai)	1,132	Bang Sai	Ayutthaya	530
23. Ban Lao		Nakhon Nayok	Nakhon Nayok	180
24. Nakhon Chaisi	3,571	Nakhon Chaisi	Nakhon Pathom	50
25. Bang Bua		Bang Bua		
Thong	5,287	Thong	Nontha Buri	75
26. Bangkok	1,299,552	Dusit (Samsen area)	Phra Nakhon	3,000
27. Paklat		Phra Pradaeng	Samut Prakan	20
28. Paknam		Samut Prakan	Samut Prakan	40
29. Sriracha	10,472	Sriracha	Chon Buri	60
30. Rayong	9,701	Rayong	Rayong	160
31. Tha Mai	5,688	Tha Mai	Chanthaburi	120
32. Chanthaburi	10,795	Chanthaburi	Chanthaburi	5,860
33. Khlung	5,072	Khlung	Chanthaburi	1,510
34. Trat	3,813	Trat	Trat	200
Total				21,989

Sources: Data on the total population of these localities are based on the census conducted by the National Statistical Office of Thailand in 1960 and on a partial survey of the population in 1965. Paklat, Paknam, and Ban Lao are Catholic parishes, but are not government administrative units. Therefore, there are no official figures for these locations.

Source: Poole (1970)

2.2.5 The Fourth Group: Migration in Post-World War II Years

Under the leadership of Field Marshal P. Phibunsongkhram, Thailand cooperated closely with Japan in order to win its claims over parts of Indochinese territory. It declared war against the allies – the United States and Britain – during the Second World War. However, the regent, Dr. Pridi Banomyong, secretly led a Free Thai Movement both in Thailand and abroad in support of the allies. With P. Phibunsongkhram's exit from politics at the end of the war, and owing to the support of the United States, Thailand did not have to suffer much from the negative impacts of the defeat of Japan. However, this period witnessed a big change in Thai politics: military rule was replaced by a civilian government under Pridi Banomyong's leadership. Fortunately, Pridi Banomyong showed his sympathy with the nationalistic activities of the Vietnamese in Thailand and, to some extent, supported those activities.

In Vietnam, with the leadership of President Ho Chi Minh, the DRV was founded following the success of the August Revolution in 1945. Ho Chi Minh declared DRV an independent state and established ties with other countries including those in Southeast Asia. In addition, he successfully concluded with France a preliminary agreement (March 1946) and a Modus Vivendi (September 1946) with a view to securing France's recognition of the DRV's status as a free state, preserving peace

in Vietnam, and promoting its international recognition (Trinh Dieu Thin, 2003: 149).

Trinh Dieu Thin has pointed out that in August 1945, the people of Laos also rose to seize power in a number of towns bordering the Mekong, especially Luang Prabang, Vientiane, Thakhek and Savannakhet, where a large number of Vietnamese nationals cooperated with Lao patriotic forces. Therefore, when French troops returned, they attacked riverside towns such as Savannakhet, Thakhek and Vientiane. There was terrible bloodshed in Thakhek, in particular, on March 21, 1946. The 60,000 Vietnamese residing in these towns had to take refuge in the northeast of Thailand.⁵ They migrated temporarily to Thai districts and provinces, such as Tha Bo, Loei, Nong Khai, Nakhon Phanom and Mukdahan.

This was the biggest wave of Vietnamese migration to Thailand that resulted from nationalistic turbulence in the region. Those Vietnamese later became an important force in the nationalistic activities of the Vietnamese in the northeast in particular and in Thailand in general. They devoted their lives to the task of liberating their country from French colonialism.

⁵ 50, 000 were the numbers of the Vietnamese refugees provided by Chan Ansuchote (1960) in "The Vietnamese in Thailand: A Case Study in Decision-Making".

2.3 Conclusion

The First Indochina War, which was a major post-WW II conflict, arose after the French had returned to Indochina to reestablish colonial rule. The event also resulted in the exodus of the Vietnamese in Laos to seek refuge in the northeast of Thailand. As indicated, this was the biggest wave of Vietnamese migrants to Thailand due to nationalistic unrest in Indochina. The Vietnamese refugees established their own community and organized nationalist movements in order to support the liberation of Vietnam from French rule. The victory of the Viet Minh at Dien Bien Phu, which put an end to French colonialism in this part of the world, also proved that the contributions of Vietnamese inside as well as outside Vietnam were essential to the war efforts.

We learn from academic works of Thai, Vietnamese and western scholars that the Vietnamese presence in Siam can be traced back at least to the 17th century. We also learn that the Vietnamese community in Siam played an important role in defending the kingdom and contributing to its prosperity. However, history also has recorded the ups and downs of the Vietnamese community in Siam. In general, the Vietnamese in Siam received good treatment from the Siamese kingdom and enjoyed their lives. However, during the reign of King Rama III, the Vietnamese in Siam had a difficult time due to the conflict between Siam and Vietnam on Cambodian territory. In addition, under

the leadership of Field Marshal P. Phibunsongkhram, the Vietnamese suffered hardships under the control imposed by the P. Phibunsongkhram government, which was backed up by the United States in an attempt to prevent the spread of communism from Vietnam and China. Given the long existence of the Vietnamese community in Siam/Thailand, most of the Vietnamese were also assimilated into Siamese society. As a result, it is hard to recognize the Vietnamese among the Thais nowadays because they have fully adapted to the culture, customs and habits of the Siamese.

Furthermore, Thai policies towards the Vietnamese community in the post-WW II period were also noticeable. Thanks to the generous policies of the Thai government led by Pridi Banomyong, the Vietnamese in Thailand in general and in the northeast in particular could stabilize their lives and contribute to nationalistic activities in Vietnam. In addition, at that time, the Thai government not only supported Viet Kieu but also the DRV. As a consequence, the Vietnamese in Thailand in this period could play an important role in the supply networks for the DRV in Thailand in terms of money, weapon, soldiers and other necessities. Hence, the nationalistic activities of the Vietnamese in this period were overt and they enjoyed the favorable conditions provided by the Pridi Banomyong government.

The above discussion is aimed to provide a general background to the First Indochina War as well as the formation of the Vietnamese community

in Thailand. Now, in order to understand the close relationship between the Vietnamese community and the Thai people in the northeast and the Thai government in the early phase of the war, we take a closer look at the roles of Thai people in the northeast of Thailand and Thai government in helping the Vietnamese in the initial period from 1946 to 1947 and also how the old Vietnamese in Thailand influenced the relations between the Thais in the northeast and the oversea Vietnamese or Viet Kieu during this period.

3**THE ROLES OF THAI PEOPLE
IN NORTHEASTERN THAILAND**

During the First Indochina War, Viet Kieu in Thailand played an important part in supporting war efforts in Vietnam. These contributions stemmed from their own efforts as well as the assistance of Thais and the Thai government. In fact, Viet Kieu received a lot of help from them, especially during the period of Prime Minister Pridi Banomyong. At that time, Viet Kieu received a lot of help from Thai people due to the good relations between the Thais and the Vietnamese during the previous period. Furthermore, the help also stemmed from the teaching of Ho Chi Minh, who was known during his stay in Siam in the late 1920s as Thau Chin. He taught Viet Kieu in Siam, or the old Vietnamese, to obey Thai law, and to respect Thai customs and traditions. Hence, they lived in harmony with the Thais and made good impressions on them.

As a result of the good relations cultivated during that time, Thai people were willing to help the Vietnamese when they were in trouble. At the government level, Prime Minister Pridi Banomyong had a policy of supporting the struggle for independence of the people in Indochina; therefore, he shared the same viewpoints with Ho Chi Minh in leading the patriotic movements. Notably, Pridi

Banomyong and his Seri Thai politicians not only helped the Vietnamese patriotic movements but also opened Thailand as a base for the DRV to connect to the outside world and for its revolutionary activities. Hence, the role of Pridi Banomyong and his Seri Thai politicians, Thai people in Nakhon Phanom and Udon Thani in supporting the Vietnamese, and the roles of Ho Chi Minh in shaping the relations between the Thais and the Vietnamese, will be explored in this chapter.

This chapter will begin with an analysis of the roles of Prime Minister Pridi Banomyong and his Seri Thai politicians in helping the patriotic movements of the Vietnamese in Thailand. Then, it will discuss the role of Ho Chi Minh in promoting Thai – Vietnamese relations, and finally it will touch upon the support Thai people in Udon Thani and Nakhon Phanom gave to the Viet Kieu.

3.1 Pridi Banomyong and Seri Thai Politicians

The Pridi Banomyong government had deep sympathy for the liberation movements of the Indochinese countries. Thus, when the Viet-Lao regional party committee sent representatives to negotiate with the Pridi Banomyong government on permission for the Vietnamese fleeing French attacks to migrate to Thailand, Pridi Banomyong was ready to welcome them. His government also formed a special committee consisting of the ministers of related ministries, such as the Ministries of Foreign

Affairs, the Interior, and Transportation, among others, to support those Vietnamese who took refuge on Thai territory. At that time, the government instructed the governors of border provinces to make good conditions for these people to migrate safely. (Nguyen Thanh Van et al, 2001: 48).

After fleeing Laos to the northeast of Thailand, Viet Kieu faced many difficulties. At that time, Prime Minister Pridi Banomyong opened Thailand for Vietnamese refugees with all available support. Pridi Banomyong prepared residences for Viet Kieu with food and medicine. Moreover, to reduce their difficulties, he instructed the local authorities to find jobs for them, such as construction and repair of roads from Nong Khai to Tha Bo, from Nakhon Phanom to Sakhon Nakhon, and Sakon Nakhon to Udon Thani. The local authorities also created other jobs for them, such as planting trees, finding firewood, making charcoal, and clearing land for farming (Thanyathip Sripana and Trinh Dieu Thin, 2006: 143-144). Pridi Banomyong allowed Viet Kieu to use some land to open “farm” in Udon Thani or to establish hamlets for gardening in Sakon Nakhon, Phu Ca Te in Nakhon Phanom, and Nong Hong in Nong Khai (Hoang Van Hoan et al, 1978: 11). As a result of that help, they could overcome many difficulties in Thailand.

Apart from helping Viet Kieu to stabilize their lives and establish their bases on Thai territory very quickly, the Pridi Banomyong government also allowed the DRV to establish a representative office in Bangkok, although the two countries did not have

diplomatic relations. Moreover, the Thai government allowed the DRV to open an information office, which was located at 543 Silom Road. According to Hoang Khac Nam (2007: 52), Vietnam at that time was isolated in foreign affairs. Relations with socialist countries in Eastern Europe and China had not yet been established, because the situation in Europe had not yet been settled and the civil war in China was still going on. Therefore, Vietnam actively directed its diplomatic openings to Thailand, Myanmar, India, and beyond. Thailand was very important because of its geographical location, the presence of a large number of patriotic Viet Kieu on its territory, and the sympathy of the Thai government. Nguyen Thanh Van et al (2001: 61) also added that the representative and the information offices were the gates whereby Vietnam could widen its relations with countries around the world and to make the outside world understand the struggle of the Indochinese peoples for independence. Furthermore, they were also channels through which to welcome the patriotic intelligentsia studying and working abroad back to serve in the war of liberation. These included people like Professor Le Thiem and the engineer Tran Dai Nghia, among others. The representative office was also a place where cadres from the north could rest on their way to the south and vice versa.

In 1947, the Pridi Banomyong government allowed Viet Kieu to found “Viet Kieu Assistance Association,” and the Viet Kieu central committee was permitted to issue the newspaper (Doc Lap)

Independence. All copies of the paper were delivered overtly to the villages (Tran Dinh Luu, 2009: 52). Moreover, Pridi Banomyong also helped the Viet Kieu community in the northeast of Thailand to build bases to train soldiers who would be sent back to South Vietnam as well as Laos to fight against the French. According to Tran Dinh Luu (2009: 53), there were 13 war zones including 2,000 soldiers. On average, each war zone had from 70 to 150 people. The biggest one was Umke-Nong Hoi with more than 420 people. Furthermore, the Pridi Banomyong government helped equip the Tran Phu battalion with good weapons such as Carbin, Thompson, etc, together with 180,000 baht in funding (Hoang Van Hoan et al, 1978: 15). In addition, besides military bases, Viet Kieu also established factories to produce and repair weapons. The support of army ordnance in Thailand for Vietnam was still humble, but it was very meaningful for the latter in the initial days of the resistance war.

More importantly, Pridi Banomyong also helped the DRV representatives in their arms procurement and transportation. Goscha (1999:215) has pointed out that Pridi Banomyong arranged special trains to transport arms and equipment of Viet Minh to Thai frontier towns, such as Ubon Ratchathani and Surin. In addition, Thai military police and even Thai Ministers such as Tiang Sirikhan and Thong-in Phuriphat helped escort the arms and equipment. As a result, the Vietnamese did not meet any troubles in transporting weapons through the borders. Goscha (1999:156) has also

mentioned that the Pridi Banomyong government gave the Vietnamese military intelligence on French positions in western Indochina and Bangkok and also shared secret radio codes with the Vietnamese to guide the transport of arms safely across the Mekong. Most importantly, on March 8, 1947, Pridi Banomyong established “Southeast Asian League” with a view to create a solidarity spirit to fight imperialism. The League included delegates from Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, Indonesia and Malaya (Hoang Van Hoan et al, 1978: 24). This represented a strong moral contribution of the Thai government in general and from Pridi Banomyong in particular to the nationalist movements in Indochina.

In 1946-1947, the Thai government gave the Vietnamese thousands of guns. For instance, in 1946 he provided 20 tons of carbines to the Viet Minh and divided the weapons into smaller portions to avoid the French (Goscha, 1999: 214). It can be said that Pridi Banomyong was one of the DRV’S most powerful postwar allies in Thailand. Like Ho, Pridi Banomyong also hoped to see an end to European colonialism in the region. Thus, he strongly supported the Indochinese nationalist movements. According to Pridi Banomyong in his memoirs (cited by Goscha, 1999: 188), the DRV’s representatives came to Bangkok to seek arms support from him.

“At the end of the war, a Vietnamese patriot contacted me to make a request for arms. I allocated a certain amount of Seri Thai arms

to the Vietnamese and, through Khun Sangwon, the military police were employed to guard the loading of these arms onto a train and oversaw their transportation to the border of Battambang, which at that time was still under Thai administration.”

As a result, Ho Chi Minh showed his gratitude to Pridi Banomyong for his support. As Pridi Banomyong recalled, “Ho Chi Minh wrote me a letter thanking me for the arms and their transportation. He said that he had just formed two battalions of patriotic Vietnamese soldiers and would now give them the name: the battalions of Siam” (Goscha, 1999: 189). Furthermore, besides him, his two Seri Thai colleagues Tiang Sirikhan and Thong-In Phuriphat were also very active in supporting the Vietnamese in terms of weapons purchases and transport. Tiang was the Minister of the Interior in the Khuang Aphaiyong cabinet from January to February 1946 and Deputy Minister of the Interior in the Pridi Banomyong cabinet from March to August 1946. In mid-1946 Thong-In Phuriphat became the Minister of Industry in the Thamrong Nawasawat cabinet (Goscha, 1999: 159). Hoang Van Hoan et al (1978: 22) stated that Minister Thong-In Phuriphat lent the Vietnamese his house for storing and repairing weapons. He also used his own police to help the Vietnamese transport weapons from the arms depot to a Bangkok wharf secretly and safely. When the coup occurred in 1947, he did not ask the Vietnamese to move weapons out of his house. MP

Tiang Sirikhan also helped the Vietnamese. According to Thanyathip Sripana and Trinh Dieu Thin (2006: 143-144), Tiang Sirikhan was responsible for helping Viet Kieu and was a great supporter of the nationalist movements of the Vietnamese in Thailand. Thanks to him, Nguyen Duc Quy could receive 700,000 baht from the Thai government to support the Vietnamese after fleeing to Thailand from Laos in 1946. Moreover, when the coup took place in 1947, he knew that the Pridi Banomyong government would be thrown out, so he opened the arms depot in his house and gave Viet Kieu six coaches to carry guns and bullets to the wharf mentioned above for transport to South Vietnam.

Indeed, thanks to the crucial roles the Seri Thai leaders assumed in supporting the patriotic movements of the Vietnamese in Thailand in general and in the northeast in particular, the latter could stabilize their lives soon and started their resistance work against the French.

3.2 Ho Chi Minh's Role in Promoting the Relations between the Thais and Viet Kieu

From the early 1900s, Siam witnessed the emergence of patriotic movements of the Vietnamese who tried to find ways to liberate Vietnam from the French colonialists. Among the patriots, Phan Boi Chau, Phan Chu Trinh, Hoang Hoa Tham, and Dang Tu Kinh were the most notable. However, unlike Nguyen Ai Quoc (an earlier alias of Ho Chi Minh), Phan Boi Chau and other patriots could not find the

right way to liberate the country. In the late 1920s, Nguyen Ai Quoc foresaw Thailand, which was still an independent country, as a crucial place from which Vietnam could open its door to the outside world.

There were many reasons for Nguyen Ai Quoc's coming to Thailand. First, in 1927 KMT's forces suppressed the revolutionary youth's association, which was established in China in 1925. Therefore, Nguyen Ai Quoc had to leave China to find a new place where he could mobilize the Vietnamese to fight the French. Second, there was a large Vietnamese community in Thailand. Most of them escaped the exploitation of the French in Vietnam and came to Thailand via Laos. Third, geographically, northeast Thailand was an ideal place for the Vietnamese nationalistic activities: it could serve, in particular, as a shelter for the Vietnamese who had escaped from the suppression of the French and KMT in China (Nguyen Van Khoan and Nguyen Tien, 2005: 133-134). At that time, the French were in full control of Indochina, and to the north, China was still under the influence of the western powers. Therefore, Thailand was the only nation for the DRV to open its western gate to escape isolation by the French. Thanyathip Sripana and Trinh Dieu Thin (2006: 126) pointed out that Nguyen Ai Quoc came to Siam twice. He came to Siam for the first time in August 1928 and left the country in November 1929. His second trip to Siam took place around March or April 1930. He came to Siam in order to establish a base for patriotic movements and also to promote patriotic love among the Vietnamese community

there. He went to different places where there were Vietnamese communities in order to disseminate the revolutionary cause among the Viet Kieu.

According to Nguyen Van Khoan and Nguyen Tien (2005: 137), wherever he stayed, he lived like ordinary people, engaging in gardening, planting trees, doing construction work, and so on. He also encouraged and helped Viet Kieu to learn Thai and to study Thai customs in order to assimilate into Thai society and gain the trust and sympathy from the locals. In addition, he attempted to provide education for the Vietnamese there. For instance, he participated in building schools for Vietnamese children to study both Thai and Vietnamese. Furthermore, he had cordial talks with the Vietnamese there about new Marxist ideas and ways to liberate the country, regional and world political situations, as well as the Vietnamese's lifestyles.

Most of the Vietnamese in the northeast in this period thought they were living in Thailand temporarily and were waiting for the time to return to their motherland. Therefore, they did not care much about studying the Thai language; nor did they pay attention to their daily work and close relations with the locals. Thanks to his new ideas, the Vietnamese changed their lifestyles. For instance, they came to pay attention to making friends with Thai people, started to learn Thai and collaborated with the latter in their work for the purpose of national liberation. Moreover, according to Hoang Khac Nam (2007: 47), he also established the "Viet Kieu Friendship Association" in order to inculcate the patriotic spirit

in Viet Kieu. Besides, Nguyen Ai Quoc educated Viet Kieu to love each other, to unite with Thais and respect Thai laws.

The activities of Nguyen Ai Quoc, alias Thau Chin, in Siam played an important part in developing love and protection by many generations of Siamese for the Viet Kieu. Siam became a source of human forces and was also a bridge for Vietnamese revolution to penetrate Vietnam.

According to Thanyathip Sripana and Trinh Dieu Thin (2006: 130), at the first meeting in Udon Thani, Mr. Chin reported in front of the party cell about the situations and prospects of world revolution as well as the long-term hardship the Vietnamese revolution faced. The revolutionary guidelines he brought involved three major tasks, namely, enlarging the organization, consolidating the essential foundation, and encouraging Viet Kieu to respect Thai customs and traditions and obey Thai laws.

The aim of the first task was to enlarge the organization and consolidate the essential foundation by encouraging Viet Kieu to participate in the “Viet Kieu Friendship Association” and the “Youth Cooperative Association.” The second task was required to consolidate the association, making it stronger and improving its ability for long-term activities. Finally, it was necessary to make Thais feel sympathetic with the Vietnamese revolution – hence, the need to observe their customs and laws. He also advised Viet Kieu to be hard working, honest, and patriotic, and suggested changing the

name of the newspaper from “Dong Thanh” to “Than Ai” disseminating it among the Viet Kieu. He also paid much attention to education for the youth by requesting the Thai government to open schools that taught both Vietnamese and Thai. For the elderly, he encouraged them to study Vietnamese and Thai, to which Viet Kieu had not paid attention in the previous time.

During the time Ho Chi Minh was staying in the northeast, he encouraged Viet Kieu to live in harmony with the Thais with the motto: “To live sincerely so that when you stay, people love you, when you leave, they miss you” (*Di cho nguoi ta nho, o cho nguoi ta thuong*). In addition, he also mentioned the necessity of friendship among the neighbors by reminding Viet Kieu of the moral meanings of the Vietnamese proverbs such as, “When eating fruits, remember who planted the tree” (*An qua nho ke trong cay*); or “A stranger nearby is better than a relative who lives far away” (*Ban anh em xa, mua lang gieng gan*).⁶ As Kieu Thi Thao, a Viet Kieu in Udon Thani, recalled the influence of Ho Chi Minh on the relations between the Thais and the Vietnamese, an old man in Udon hani provided free residence in his garden for the Vietnamese migrants. He also gave them food and showed his sympathy for the Vietnamese. When he was asked why he helped the Vietnamese, he said that he was Thau Chin’s friend and remembered Thau Chin’s words: “Please help the Vietnamese in case they

⁶ Interview with Mr. Pham Duc Minh in Udon Thani

have problems.” He loved Thau Chin; therefore, he was enthusiastic to help the Vietnamese when they migrated to Thailand from Laos.⁷

In dealing with Thai officials, Thau Chin showed his respect for Thai customs and behaved flexibly. And as has been pointed out, he also advised Viet Kieu to learn Thai, helped Thais when they were in need, and respected local traditions. Therefore, leaders of the villages and districts and other officials loved and supported him. Ho Chi Minh set a good example through his lifestyle, such that he not only received help from the Thai people but also from the local authorities. For example, when the local authorities were ordered to capture him according to the French request, they informed him to escape. Particularly, when the raid took place at Wat Pho (a Buddhist temple in Udon Thani), the Chao Awat (the abbot) protected him by explaining that the temple was being renovated, so no one stayed there (Nguyen Van Khoan and Nguyen Tien, 2005: 136).

Even several decades later, Ho Chi Minh’s image was still very impressive among Thai people. As Thai novelist and intellectual Kulap Saipradit expressed his thoughts about Ho Chi Minh: “I think of a lofty morality of a father-figure that I study about the time Ho Chi Minh stayed in my country as well as his endurance. For instance, in 1928, he walked through the forest and streams from Phichit to Udon, carrying luggage more than 10 days in

⁷ Interview with Mrs. Kieu Thi Thao - a Viet Kieu in Udon Thani

order to educate and train his people. I think that Thais will appreciate if they know that he asked Viet Kieu in Thailand to respect the customs and traditions of Thais and obey the Thai laws...” (Cited in Tran Ngoc Danh, 1999: 93)

In brief, the role and influence of Ho Chi Minh was very strong on the Viet Kieu community in Thailand, which was famous for its patriotic love, solidarity, diligence, and hard-working spirit. Gradually, Thais came to recognize that in addition to doing business and participating in patriotic movements, Viet Kieu lived in harmony with Thais, respected Thai laws and contributed to the development of the Thai economy. Monks and other local authorities also advised Thais to follow the Viet Kieu’s lifestyle. Indeed, from 1928 to 1930, Ho Chi Minh played a crucial role in promoting good relations between the Thais and Vietnamese that would last for decades.

3.3 The Help from the Thais in Northeastern Thailand

It is undeniable that the support of the Thai people for Viet Kieu in the northeast in general, and in Nakhon Phanom and Udon Thani in particular, was remarkable. They helped Viet Kieu not only in stabilizing their lives but also in their patriotic activities. As a result, Viet Kieu in Thailand nowadays still shows deep gratitude toward the Thai people for their support, even though several decades have passed. The support of the Thai people for Viet

Kieu was most crucial following the Thakhek incident in 1946. It was clear to those who survived this incident how Thai people were very kind and generous to Viet Kieu when the latter were in a miserable condition. Without their help, Viet Kieu could not have overcome numerous difficulties in the initial days after they came to Thailand. The support of Thai people for Viet Kieu can be divided into two main periods: the Pridi Banomyong period (1946-1947) and the P. Phibunsongkhram period (1947-1954).

The Pridi Banomyong period witnessed strong support of Thai people for Viet Kieu as stemming from the encouragement of the Thai government. Viet Kieu left Laos for Thailand with just the clothes on their bodies. The locals in Nakhon Phanom provided them with food, residence, clothes and other necessities. Hence, the crucial help made Viet Kieu feel warm and relieved their misery in their initial days in Thailand. This proved that the Thai people were kind and sympathetic toward the Viet Kieu. According to Hoang Van Hoan et al (1978: 11), some Thais also lent Viet Kieu their houses, lands and fund to do business. Kieu Thi Thao recalled the kind support from a Thai family when she went to a remote area to exchange goods. She was treated kindly and provided with food from that family. When the sun set, a man from that family sent her home and carried goods for her through forests and fields. Thus, even now, she still appreciated the family a lot. The event was a bridge to link her to the new relations with the Thais.

The support of the Thai people during this period also stemmed from another reason; that is, both the Thais and the Vietnamese had the same enemy – the French colonialists. Ho Chi Minh also shared the same idea, “Vietnam is a colony; Siam is a semi-colony. Vietnam is oppressed by France, and Thailand is also forced to sign many unfair treaties by the French. We hate the French, Thais don’t like the French. Thailand and Vietnam are neighbors. Thais must be sympathetic with the movements against French in Vietnam” (Cited in Tran Ngoc Danh, 1999: 27).

Because the old Vietnamese in Thailand taught by Ho Chi Minh lived in harmony with Thai people and made good impressions on them, the latter were willing to help the new Vietnamese migrants. The existing harmony, in short, was the basis for their good relations with the new Vietnamese who arrived in 1946. Furthermore, they were Buddhists, so they did good deeds to earn merit according to the Buddha’s teachings and also from the encouragement from Thai government.⁸

In contrast, the period of P. Phibunsongkhram witnessed the ups and downs of the Vietnamese in Thailand due to the anti-communist policy of his government. The Thai government propagated the idea that Viet Kieu were spies or “fifth columns” who supported communism, which was a great threat to Thai national security. As a consequence, the decline in support from the Thai people for the

⁸ Interview with Mrs. Kieu Thi Thao in Udon Thani

Vietnamese was recognized during this turbulent period. According to Associate Professor Sorat Pitchomchum (Rachabath University, Udon Thani), around 20 per cent of the Thai people showed their protests against the Vietnamese following the propaganda from the Thai government compared to less than 5 per cent during the Pridi Banomyong period. Most of the protestors were civil servants and high-ranking officials who were under the influence of Thai government propaganda.⁹

Thais believed in the propaganda of their government and the United States about how communism could cause hardships to people. Thus, the Thai people did not like communism. However, in daily life, they loved Viet Kieu because of their good lifestyles. As a result, they supported Viet Kieu not only in their daily problems but also for the revolutionary cause of fighting the French, who were regarded as their common enemy.¹⁰ Living in the same community, they shared the same viewpoint and other problems in life. Therefore, they made “xieu” – a kind of sworn brotherhood to share all the happiness and sorrows in life. Thanks to support from Thai people, Viet Kieu could isolate themselves from the government: though the government issued many unfair policies, the local authorities and people only carried out some of these policies, and then only

⁹ However, according to Vu Manh Hung from Udon Thani, the protestors accounted for about 50 per cent during Phibunsongkhram period.

¹⁰ Interview with Mr. Wuthichai Boonbutta, Udonthani

perfunctorily. Mrs. Lec Xo Kham, a female Thai in Udon Thani recalled that her family made “xieu” with a Viet Kieu family. They helped each other when they had problems in life. Moreover, when a Viet Kieu family was raided by the Thai police, her family helped them to hide their properties in her house, which also served as a shelter for that family.¹¹

In conclusion, even though the political situation had changed dramatically in Thailand, the relations between the Thais and the Vietnamese still remained on good terms. They overcame obstacles resulting from the government’s anti-communist policy in order to establish cordial relations between the two peoples. In fact, the relationship between the Thais and the Vietnamese was tested through time and it was a base for stable relations between the two countries decades later.

3.4 Conclusion

There were no doubts about the support of the Thai people for Viet Kieu in the northeast in general and in Nakhon Phanom and Udon Thani in particular. Through the history of the Vietnamese community in Thailand, it is easy to recognize that Thai people played an important part in establishing and strengthening the Vietnamese community as well as their patriotic activities. Notably, the roles of Thai leaders such as Pridi Banomyong and his Seri Thai

¹¹ Interview with Mrs. Lec Xo Kham, Udonthani

politicians in supporting the Vietnamese during the First Indochina War are unforgettable. Thanks to the valuable help from the Thai people in general and Thai politicians in particular, the Vietnamese community could build strong patriotic movements to support war efforts in Vietnam and contributed their part to the victory at Dien Bien Phu against the French. In addition to the role of Prime Minister Pridi Banomyong, Ho Chi Minh also played an important part in developing the relations between the Thais and the Vietnamese during his stay in Siam. The valuable help from the Thai people would play a crucial role in further developing the relations between the two peoples several decades later.

4**THE ROLES OF VIET KIEU IN THAILAND**

During the First Indochina War, the Viet Kieu in Thailand in general and in the northeast in particular played an essential role in fighting French colonialism in Vietnam. When the Viet Kieu fled to the northeast of Thailand from Laos to avoid ruthless French suppression in 1946, they could not bring anything with them apart from the clothes they were wearing. Thanks to the help of the Thais in providing jobs, accommodation, food and other necessities, the Viet Kieu were able to stabilize their lives, organize their community and launch many patriotic activities to help Vietnam gain independence from the French colonialists.

The large number of Viet Kieu in Thailand made them important in terms of contributing to the supply networks of the DRV. With the help of the locals and the Pridi Banomyong government, Viet Kieu organized many patriotic activities with a view to obtaining money, weapons, soldiers and other necessities to support the war efforts in Vietnam. The organization and activities of the Vietnamese in Thailand, their contributions to the supply networks of the DRV, as well as the support from Thai officials all functioned to help Vietnam's struggle for independence. In order to understand the role of the Vietnamese in Thailand during the First Indochina

War, it is essential to gain insights into their organizations and contributions.

This chapter will begin with an analysis of the organizations and activities of the Vietnamese during two periods of time during the war (1946-1947 and 1948-1954). Then, it will discuss the contributions of the Vietnamese in terms of soldiers, weapons and money, as well as the support from Thai officials, especially those belonging to the Seri Thai group.

4.1 Organizations and Activities of Viet Kieu in Northeastern Thailand

Suffering from many difficulties when they first came to Thailand, Viet Kieu quickly found various ways to earn a living thanks to the support from old Viet Kieu, Thais and the Thai government. After settling down, Viet Kieu formed a general association to mobilize other Viet Kieu – encouraging them to participate in the patriotic movements to support the war efforts in Vietnam.

The Viet Kieu General Association was systematically organized with a clear echelon of a command system. The highest body of the association was the central committee, or Tong Hoi in Vietnamese, which controlled all the patriotic movements of Viet Kieu in Thailand. All of the activities of the central committee followed the instructions from Ha Noi and had close ties with the DRV. All of the activities and the key figures of the central committee remained strictly in secret in order

to avoid suppression by the Thai police. Although the central committee was based in Udon Thani, it was also mobile – moving from province to province in the northeast of Thailand to avoid the surveillance and raids by Thai authorities. Furthermore, the central committee was also in direct contact with the DRV in Ha Noi in order to obtain guidelines on its work. Its functions were to mobilize the Vietnamese to the patriotic movements and to lead them in the right track in support of the war efforts against the French in Vietnam.

Below the central committee was the area or provincial committee, or *Dia Phuong* in Vietnamese. According to Chan Ansuchote (1960: 76), this level of the organization was based in areas where at least 1,000 Vietnamese refugees were present – normally in big provinces such as Nong Khai, Sakon Nakhon, Nakhon Phanom, Ubon Ratchathani and Prachin Buri. Each area committee had its own headquarters, which was a place for Viet Kieu to listen to the radio transmitted from Ha Noi in order to keep up with the latest news in Vietnam, Thailand and around the world. Each area committee was divided into many different districts or local committees (or *Lang* in Vietnamese and village in English) and had a village leader. Each district committee had at least 500 Vietnamese refugees (Chan Ansuchote, 1960: 76). Each member of the district committee was assigned the responsibility for one particular activity, such as propaganda and training, elementary education, external relations, economic and financial affairs, detection of diversionists and resistance, etc. They

engaged in actual work and review of their work regularly.

The lowest level in the organization consisted of cells. Each local committee was divided into one or more cells depending on its scale. Each cell consisted of male adults, women and youths. The youth group, or Nhi Dong in Vietnamese, was responsible for children between six and twelve years of age. They were taught in Vietnamese by Vietnamese teachers to learn about the Vietnamese history and consider Ho Chi Minh as their national hero (Chan Ansuchote, 1960: 79).

Chan Ansuchote (1960: 79) also added that youths between 12 and 18 years of age were given lessons in Marxism. They were trained in athletic games, strict discipline, unity and loyalty to the community. The education and training of Vietnamese youths had to be done in secret because the Thai government banned education in Vietnamese. If the police captured the teacher, they were deported or put in prison. Therefore, the association launched the movement “school at home” with less than seven pupils per class to avoid raids from the Thai police. Pupils hid their books under their shirts when going to classes and all the classes were conducted under the close watch of Viet Kieu guards and Viet Kieu in the neighborhood.

People of the ages between 18 and 45 were automatically considered as members of the Viet Minh. They were trained in discipline and loyalty to the party (Chan Ansuchote, 1960: 80). At the end of 1946 and the beginning of 1947, thanks to support

from the Pridi Banomyong government, the General Association asked permission to open “Viet Kieu Assistance Association” in order to operate overtly and legally (Nguyen Thanh Van et al, 2001: 54). This association had its own printing press to publish a daily paper called “Doc Lap” with a circulation of 10,000 copies in order to let Thais and people around the world know about the Vietnamese resistance war against the French (Nguyen Thanh Van et al, 2001: 55).

Under the government of Pridi Banomyong, Viet Kieu in Thailand enjoyed the freedom to participate in patriotic movements and activities for national salvation. All areas where Viet Kieu concentrated had an office of the Viet Kieu national salvation association. At the local level, Viet Kieu salvation branch typed a summary of daily news from the Voice of Vietnam in order to disseminate among Viet Kieu (Hoang Van Hoan et al, 1978: 12). In districts or provinces where a lot of Viet Kieu resided, overt political activities for the liberation war in Vietnam were undertaken. Red flags with a yellow star hung at the headquarters of Viet Kieu salvation association. Youths were organized into self-defense units. Viet Kieu’s arsenals also worked overtly. According to Hoang Van Hoan et al (1978: 49), annually, Viet Kieu celebrated three important holidays: Ho Chi Minh’s birthday (on the 19th of May), Independence Day (on the 2nd of September), and the New Year day. This was a chance for Viet Kieu to gather to review what they had done for the country and try to overcome their obstacles. Every Viet Kieu’s household hung a red flag with yellow

star and its members went in formal clothes to meetings at big areas such as the stadium in the district or province (Nguyen Thanh Van et al, 2001: 54). After the meeting, they also played games together and staged artistic performance. Therefore, they lived in harmony with one another and enjoyed the sympathy of the Thai government. As a result, they quickly adapted themselves to the new environment where they had settled down. With their patriotic love and lifestyle, other aliens and Thai people also praised them. Thai monks and local authorities usually advised Thai people to follow Viet Kieu's lifestyles (Hoang Van Hoan et al, 1978: 49).

Recalling the activities and organizations of the Vietnamese community in the northeast of Thailand, a Viet Kieu in Udon Thani still showed his pride when he talked about the patriotic activities of the Vietnamese community with many campaigns to mobilize both the material and human forces for the war in Vietnam.

Case Study 1

Pham Duc Minh (Udon Thani) pointed out that thanks to the clear and overt organization, the central committee could mobilize Viet Kieu to join the patriotic activities. At that time, what they did was just for the national liberation movements in Vietnam. The good thing here was that they believed one another completely. For instance, the money collected from the Vietnamese community and sent to Vietnam to support the war was only known by

some key figures of the association, but the rest of the association did not ask or act suspect about the amount of money collected. They showed their strong solidarity and felt pleasure to contribute their small part to the national liberation movements in Vietnam. Therefore, they devoted all their abilities and properties with the purpose of liberating Vietnam from the French. One interesting thing was that in Thailand there are four Buddhist days a month. Thus, Viet Kieu took this opportunity to keep a vegetarian diet in order to save money for the activities of national salvation

However, when Field Marshal P. Phibunsongkhram came to power at the end of 1948, Viet Kieu's fate in Thailand turned. From 1948, given the closeness of the Thai government to the United States and the influence of the latter's propaganda, there was a change in Thai policy that began to affect the situations of Viet Kieu in Thailand. For example, activities for Viet Kieu patriotic movements could no longer be openly conducted. Viet Kieu could not hang the DRV's flag in front of their association anymore. Everything must be in secret. According to Hoang Van Hoan et al (1978: 35), the cadres and some Viet Kieu also handed in money to be issued with "Tang Dao," a paper to certify their alien status, in order to move around the country freely (the General Association had not allowed Viet Kieu to get this paper before). The motto "Viet-Thai friendship" was carried out widely.

In March 1948, the central committee and Ho Chi Minh appointed Hoang Van Hoan as the DRV's representative to be responsible for all patriotic activities in Thailand in order to deal with the changing situations since P. Phibunsongkhram came to power. Hoang Van Hoan came to Thailand at the end of June in 1948; this period witnessed bad propaganda against Viet Kieu from the Thai government, and Viet Kieu cadres were not fully aware of the changing situations. Thus, Hoang Van Hoan opened a meeting with all the cadres in northeastern Thailand in order to give out new ways to host patriotic activities in Thailand. As a result, at the end of 1948, there had been no overt patriotic activities of Viet Kieu in northeastern Thailand like the previous period. This new orientation was adopted to suit the new situations (Hoang Van Hoan et al, 1978: 30-35).

Talking about the changes in Thai policies towards the Vietnamese since P. Phibunsongkhram came to power, a Viet Kieu in Nakhon Phanom recalled the impacts of the US on Thai policies towards the Vietnamese community in the northeast of Thailand as reported in Case Study 2.

Case Study 2

Dang Bang (Nakhon Phanom) said that P. Phibunsongkhram recognized the Bao Dai regime due to urges from the US. Thus, through the radio, the Thai government also propagandized about the threat of a communist spread. Moreover, the south regime also established information offices in the

northeastern provinces in order to convince the Vietnamese community to follow the south regime and the US with certain privileges from the Thai government, such as free movement. However, those information offices were generally empty because no Viet Kieu stepped in there because most Viet Kieu were faithful to the DRV.

The form of organization and ways of activities were also adjusted to suit the new situations so that they were not beneficial to Viet Kieu. The provincial committee was downgraded to a district-level committee, and the district committee was likewise transformed into a village committee. Depending on the number of families it had and its location, each village was divided into small hamlets; each small hamlet consisted of about 20 families, which were further organized into some sex teams, each of which had about 8 to 10 people for meetings. The organized villages were named after the names of Thai villages, districts, or provinces, such as Nong Khai, Tha Bo, Udon, and so on. The small hamlet was also named after the ordinal number of such small hamlet 1, 2, and etc; or the name of the streets and the like. The members of the village committee were appointed to be responsible for missions such as propaganda and training; educating children and youths, agitation and propaganda among women, new lifestyle, Viet-Thai friendship, caution, and so on. The small hamlet committee consisted of the leaders of parents, women, youths and assistant leaders of small hamlet (Nguyen Thanh Van et al, 2001: 54).

All monthly and other periodical activities were carried out according to the units of sex. There were no big meetings with thousands of people at a stadium as in the past. Each meeting must be organized at a secret place with a way for escape and must have body guards. The leaders of the village must work in secret and had legal jobs in order to avoid the observation of the Thai police. All the meetings to celebrate the national festival were now held at pagodas according to the units of the village – that is, connecting political practices with religious activities. Therefore, the local authorities could not prevent them from engaging in such activities (Nguyen Thanh Van et al, 2001: 54).

With the strict policies of the Thai government against Viet Kieu, the General Association found ways to reduce the impacts of these policies by stimulating patriotic love from Viet Kieu. One of the most popular ways to make people love their country was to make a “national altar” in every household. This way was adopted in 1948, and when the situation became more difficult, the practice was even more strongly emphasized. Viet Kieu took this practice very seriously. Instead of hanging the DRV’s flag outside, they used it to decorate their altar. Beside the red flag with yellow star and the portrait of Ho Chi Minh, there were also slogans, such as “the country is all, long live Ho Chi Minh”, “Viet-Thai friendship, industrious and thrifty, patient to overcome all the difficulties,” and so on (Hoang Van Hoan et al. 1978: 48).

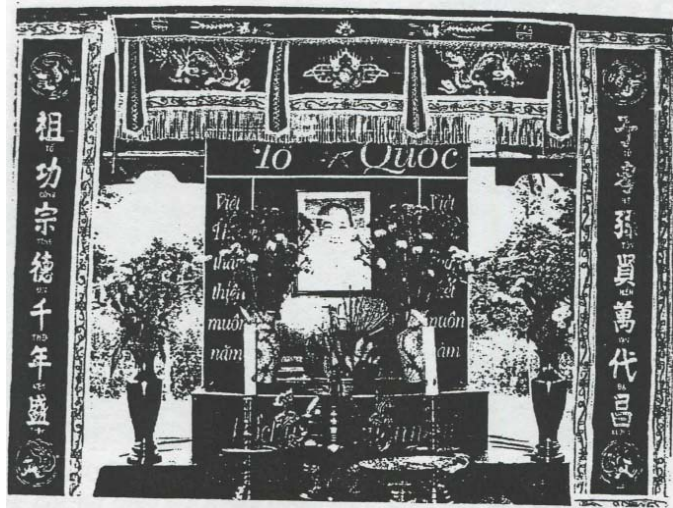


Figure 5: Viet Kieu Thailand in Thailand
 Source: Thanyathip Sripana and Trinh Dieu Thin (2006)

Case Study 3

Pham Duc Minh recalled that Viet Kieu in the northeast of Thailand established the national altar in order to increase their patriotic love. However, the Thai government would like to reduce their patriotic love by destroying the national altar. When the Thai police came to Viet Kieu's houses to carry out the decree, some did not dare to destroy it but some did. For those who did had problems with their health and some passed away. As a result of this, there was a rumor, "the national altar was very holy, and whoever destroyed it would have problems in their lives." As a consequence, the Thai police were less aggressive in destroying the national altar.

The guideline of the Association was that Viet Kieu strictly followed the policies and law of the Thai government. For example, they must try to obtain their personal papers, ask permission when going out of their residences, or sell goods with fixed and suitable prices. Among Viet Kieu, the Association promoted solidarity in funerals and wedding ceremonies. Meetings must be kept secret with guards, documents must be hidden away, and so on (Vu Manh Hung et al, 1976: 37).

In general, the General Association carried out four main activities. First, in view of many cases of suppression, it was necessary to maintain solidarity. The Association encouraged the cadres to believe in the inhabitants, stick close to the inhabitants, and help them in all situations. Viet Kieu also showed their solidarity by helping one another build houses, reclaim garden land, dig wells, celebrate wedding ceremonies, and organize funeral functions. They also visited one another when they were sick or gave birth. Each association branch had a reconciliation committee to solve the disagreements among Viet Kieu. Those who were responsible for finance collected monthly dues and rice savings from Viet Kieu (Nguyen Thanh Van et al, 2001: 54).

Second, for Viet-Thai friendship, the General Association encouraged Viet Kieu to build up close relations with Thais, make Thai people understand and support their just activities. One interesting thing about the old customs in the northeast was the ceremony of two friends swearing to be brothers, or “xieu” in Thai; they took an oath to be faithful to

each other, live and die together. Usually, the monk presided over the ceremony and tied a thread on the wrists of the two friends. During the ceremony, the two friends drank anointed water from the same cup and swore to become faithful friends and brothers till the end of their lives. Usually the ceremony was followed by a big celebration during which their friends and relatives wished them luck (Chan Ansuchote, 1960: 83).

Thus, the General Association encouraged Viet Kieu to create brotherhood ties of this kind with their new northeastern friends, and each family had at least one Thai xieu (a friend who had sworn to become its brother). When they became brothers in this way, they would share all the sorrows and happiness in each other's lives. As a consequence, Thai xieu showed their profound sympathy for their Viet brothers who were adversely affected by the unfair policies applied by the P. Phibunsongkhram government. Thanks to their help, Viet Kieu could overcome troubles during the time of their patriotic movements in Thailand.

Case study 4

Hoang Ngoc Diep (Nakhon Phanom) recalled that besides proclaiming "xieu," Viet Kieu also tried many ways to make good relations with Thais. For instance, on the New Year day, Viet Kieu invited Thai friends and their "xieu" to have meals in their houses and also offered presents to them. This really made their relations become more cordial. As a

result, it was Thais that helped them to avoid the raids from Thai police by telling them the news in advance.

Third, the General Association encouraged Viet Kieu to change their lifestyles. They must not participate in gambling or superstitious activities. They must show their friendliness to their neighbors, especially Thai people. They must be helpful in all cases and throughout their lives. All this was to prove that Viet Kieu were honest, hard-working, kind and helpful. The motto “To live sincerely so that when you leave, people miss you, when you stay, they love you,” which they carried out every day, really made their relationship with Thai people more and more cordial. That was also the way that they reduced the impact of the strict control by the Thai government. Indeed, when the government issued new policies against the interests of Viet Kieu, the local authorities were reluctant to carry them out, or only did so perfunctorily.¹²

Finally, the General Association must exercise caution in engaging in activities. The Association continued consolidating small hamlets, reducing the local committees and small hamlet committees to smaller ones. All the activities were carried out cautiously; cadres were always ready to destroy documents when the situations turned unfavorable. They worked secretly and noticed the observation from the police. The Association usually asked Viet Kieu to exercise “three NOs” (no know,

¹² Interview with Mr. Pham Duc Minh (Udon Thani)

no hear, no see) with strangers, and two “YESs” (observation and report) (Nguyen Thanh Van et al, 2001: 79).

In the struggle, Viet Kieu avoided clashes, used flexible ways to deal with the hard policies, and made good relations with local authorities in order to avoid or reduce the impacts of the government policies.

Case Study 5

Tran Ngoc Dinh (Udon Thani) said that thanks to the good relations with the locals, Viet Kieu could reduce the bad situations that were brought about by the unfair policies of the Thai government. He gave a good example of some Thai officials who, when having meetings with their leaders, protested against their leaders if the latter distorted badly the Vietnamese community. These actions showed that they understood and sympathized deeply with the Vietnamese.

According to Vu Manh Hung et al (1976: 45), the cadres of all levels were consolidated with the following practical programs:

- The propaganda and training branch compiled documents for all cadres to carry out the policies effectively.
- The work for profit branch developed programs to guide Viet Kieu to build new lifestyles, to encourage their hard working spirit, to help them avoid social evils, and to

solve disagreements among Viet Kieu in order not to file a lawsuit against one another.

- The Viet-Thai friendship branch aimed to develop close relations with the local authorities, encourage Viet Kieu to have good relations with Thais, respect their customs and traditions, and avoid doing anything against the laws.
- The branch responsible for caution and ensuring security kept a close watch on strangers, noticed the opponents and applied three NOs: no know, no hear, no see and two YESs: observation and report.
- Gender activities were aimed to ensure that the youths engaged in remarkable activities, such as sports and sport exchanges with other regions.
- Cultural and educational activities involved mass education and elementary education. In 1947, Viet Kieu assistance association assigned the cultural and educational committee to compile all subjects for elementary education, and in 1954, elementary education was transformed into “school at home” movements with only seven pupils per class.

Following a hierarchical chain of command, the General Association organized many patriotic movements. The most capable movement was to join the army in Viet Kieu bases in the northeast. Even some families bought guns for their sons to join the army. The “rice saving jar” movement was also

popular. Everyday before cooking, they would put a handful of rice in the jar to save it for the soldiers. Furthermore, every month, each family also gave 10 baht to the association for the nationalist movement. Besides, Viet Kieu also bought the DRV's bonds in order to support the war efforts in Vietnam.¹³ In addition, the industrious and thrifty movements to save homes and nations were also among the most popular in those difficult years. In this movement, Viet Kieu competed with one another to do one more thing; each team did one more thing in order to contribute to saving the country and also to their benefits. This movement not only helped maintain the patriotic love but also helped Viet Kieu especially the youths to avoid the influence of a dissolute and luxurious life in Thailand – a country regarded as neo-colonial in nature (Hoang Van Hoan et al, 1978: 48).

Chan Ansuchote (1960: 81) also provided insights into the operations of the General Association by citing one particular case. The Association tried many ways in order to help its members especially those still remaining unemployed to earn a living. A trusted member would obtain loans from the Association to conduct or expand their business. The profit they derived from their business would be turned over bit by bit to the Association. Therefore, the Association would have many people responsible for the interests of their fellow countrymen engaging in commercial

¹³ Interview with Mr. Nguyen Xuan Khien (Nakhon Phanom)

activities, such as butchery, grocery, tailoring, and cloth selling.

In dealing with the strict policies of the Thai government, the General Association provided Viet Kieu with guidance on how to reduce its consequences. In fact, there were many different ways to deal with the Thai police. For instance, when the Thai police from Bangkok went to Nong Khai to capture Viet Kieu men to resettle them in Patthalung in the south of Thailand, the General Association mobilized female residents of this province to protest against the Thai police by lying down on the streets, shaving their hair, crying to get public attention, stopping the coach carrying Viet Kieu and starting the campaign of petitioning the King, the Thai government, and the media against the police. Viet Kieu had civil servants, teachers, and soldiers write petitions for them in order to seek sympathy from the public.¹⁴

Another case was when the local authorities in Nakhon Phanom and Sakon Nakhon announced that they would send Viet Kieu to the south of Vietnam at the end of 1954, the General Association encouraged Viet Kieu to write petitions both in Thai and Vietnamese to the local authorities, the King, government agencies, embassies of foreign countries, the organizations of the United Nations in Bangkok, and the Red Cross. Some families dug graves in front of their houses and prepared coffins and knives; and

¹⁴ Interview with Mr. Nguyen Xuan Khien (Nakhon Phanom)

in case they were forced to return to the south of Vietnam, they would die in Thailand. From this struggle, Viet Kieu verbally spread the two sentences:

“Carry us to the north of Vietnam
To the South? Carry our corpses”

Another way of making a strong impression on Thai people and local authorities was for Viet Kieu women in the northeast to shave their hair and wear black clothes to show their protests against this policy.¹⁵ One good example for this case was that Ms Tu Thi Ly was a very beautiful woman at that time. She was a tailor and a hairdresser. Many Thai men and Thai officials bet that she would not shave her hair. However, one night she shaved her head and wore black clothes like other women to show her protest. This action made Thai men admire her sacrifice. (Nguyen Thanh Van et al, 2001: 106). Through the struggle, Viet Kieu showed their solidarity, and their patriotic love was tested through many difficulties. Moreover, from these situations, they also showed their flexibility in dealing with the Thai police and also kept good relations with the local people so that they still received sympathy and help and public opinions to overcome all the troubles.

¹⁵ Interview with Mr. Dong Van Son (Nakhon Phanom)

4.2 Vietnamese's Contributions to the Patriotic Movements

There are no doubts that Viet Kieu in Thailand ran a very strong supply network for the war effort in Vietnam. Thanks to their support, the DRV had an essential gate to link the DRV to other countries in the region and in the world. At first, the goods going through this supply network were mainly weapons, which were either bought by the central committee and the south of Vietnam or acquired with the help of the Thai government, or bought by Viet Kieu themselves. Some of these weapons were even produced by their arms factories, which included mines, grenades, and so on (Hoang Van Hoan et al, 1978: 22).

In 1946, Viet Kieu in Thailand received the request from General Vo Nguyen Giap to provide trained soldiers, arms, supplies, medicines and equipment from Thailand to Vietnam. At that time, the Thai supply line was really beneficial to the Viet Minh, because Thailand had become a major source of war materials after World War II. Moreover, the Viet Minh leaders in Thailand also had good relations with Seri Thai leaders and Royal Thai Army officials; so they had opportunities to gain access to large quantities of arms. In the late 1930s, the Japanese army had brought a large quantity of weapons to Thailand. In mid 1945, the allies dropped a lot of weapons to the Seri Thai to fight the Japanese. There were also weapons taken from

Japanese troops who surrendered at the end of the war (Goscha, 1999: 184).

During the First Indochina War, most of the supplies from the General Association in Thailand were soldiers. They had strong bases in different provinces in Thailand that could supply forces to the western front in Vietnam. The supply of both men and weapons played an important part in supporting the war in the south of Vietnam. Beside weapons, Viet Kieu also sent many necessities, such as medicine, spare parts for broadcasting stations, and machines for printing paper money (Hoang Van Hoan et al, 1978: 23). Although Viet Kieu had to deal with the suppression by the Thai government, they still devoted their abilities to the war in Vietnam. They sent medicine and weapons; took care of the wounded; and made other contributions to bringing the First Indochina War to an end after the victory at Bien Bien Phu, which made the world take notice of Vietnam. (Hoang Van Hoan et al, 1978: 42)

4.2.1 Soldiers

Though Viet Kieu had migrated to Thailand from Laos, the patriotic armed forces of Thai-Lao Viet Kieu were still maintained. However, for the first some months, they earned a living like other people by doing various kinds of jobs. But in their minds, the patriotic love was still very strong. As a result, when the General Association launched a movement to establish bases to train soldiers for the western front in Vietnam, most youths were ready to

join the army. According to Hoang Van Hoan et al (1978: 14), when joining the army, in order to reduce the burden for Viet Kieu communities, Viet Kieu soldiers took jobs provided by the Thai government to build roads in Si Chiang Mai and Tha Bo, so they had both food and reasons to work together in units. In daytime, they built roads; they did military training and studied politics in the forests secretly at night. They kept the regulations very seriously and lived in harmony with one another. Therefore, people in the region admired them and had good feelings about them.

Thanks to the help from Thai democratic-minded politicians and the Thai government, some areas such as Si Chiang Mai (in Nong Khai Province), Tha Bo, Udon Thani, Phonphisai, That Phanom, Mukdahan, and Tak, among others, were places where training camps were located or arms were produced to support the western front in the south of Vietnam (Hoang Van Hoan et al, 1978: 18). Thai local authorities and Thai people let Viet Kieu carry out their patriotic activities with obvious sympathetic attitude. According to Goscha (1999: 214), between 1946 and 1954, Viet Kieu communities in Thailand provided around 6,000 recruits. Pridi Banomyong facilitated their work by allowing them to operate from Thai soil and by providing continued military assistance. According to Nguyen Thanh Van et al (2001: 57), thanks to support from the Thai government; Viet Kieu could organize 13 bases to provide soldiers for the western front in South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. According to Tran

Dinh Luu (2009: 53), there were a total of 2,000 soldiers in the above 13 bases. On average, each base had from 70 to 150 people. The biggest one was the base in Nakhon Phanom with 420 soldiers including ex-soldiers from Savanakheth, Thakhek and Vientiane. For each base, depending on the number of soldiers and the time needed for political study and military training, the command committee negotiated with local authorities, asking them to create road construction projects and hence jobs for soldiers. Building roads helped Viet Kieu soldiers earn money to buy food. Building roads was hard work and many people wanted to give up. But when thinking about the big goal ahead, all people were eager to work and this was also a good example of their patriotic love. Weapons and military equipment had been brought from Laos since 1946. Besides, thanks to good relations with the Thai government and Seri Thai, the government and Seri Thai politicians facilitated Viet Kieu's procurement of new weapons. Moreover, they also offered Viet Kieu guns, bullets and military equipment. They were equipped with machine guns made in the USA, Britain and Japan, so their firepower was rather strong. The money to buy weapons was from the golden week; that is, the money raised from 100,000 Viet Kieu (Dao Manh Due, 1997: 42).

In June 1946, Viet Kieu started to build fighting units to be sent to Vietnam. More than 100 soldiers were selected from Viet Kieu at Ta Om base and from Viet Kieu youths in Battambang to form a unit to be sent to southern Vietnam. After one month

of studying politics and undergoing military training, in August 10, 1946, Mr. Tran Van Giau, the representative from the DRV's Ministry of Defense, named the unit Doc Lap I and soldiers were equipped with good weapons bought in Thailand. They arrived at Tay Ninh on September 20, 1946 (Nguyen Thanh Van et al, 2001: 58).

Another battalion was Quang Trung with over 100 people well equipped with machine guns and bullets. According to Dao Manh Due (1997: 68), the battalion Quang Trung went back to Vietnam on November 15, 1946, and arrived at Vinh Gia (interwar zone IX), on January 5, 1947.

The battalion Tran Phu (named after the first secretary general of the ICP (Indochinese Communist Party) included soldiers from Thakhek, Savannakhet, Vientiane and some from Thailand. In order to stabilize soldiers' lives, the commanding committee took the job of enlarging a 10-kilometer road from their base to Na Kae in Nakhon Phanom Province. Therefore, soldiers both did the military training and enlarged the road. The units in the battalion took turn to do the military training for one day and enlarged the road another day. Some nights, they also practiced long-distance operations. The soldiers lived in harmony with the locals and observed the military regulations very strictly, so the locals loved and protected them. As a result, the friendship and solidarity between the locals and soldiers were more and more cordial. (Le Quoc San, 1989a: 37). On December 22, 1946, the Tran Phu battalion from the base in Nakhon Phanom went back to Vietnam and

arrived at Tay Ninh Province on February 27, 1947, after 65 days of various difficulties on the way back. The battalion was assigned to fight in interwar zone VIII, especially in Sa Dec front in the Mekong Delta (Dong Thap Province nowadays). The battalion had a glorious feat of arms and contributed to the enlargement of the liberated area and made the French and their Vietnamese lackeys frightened (Hoang Van Hoan et al, 1978: 15).

The first victory of the Tran Phu battalion in Vietnamese territory was at the Giong Dinh battle in Tay Ninh province. The commanding committee held a meeting to welcome the Tran Phu battalion. The meeting was joined by many locals, local soldiers and people from Sai Gon (old name of Ho Chi Minh City). At that time, there was an announcement that the French troops would raid the area early the next day. Giong Dinh was a flat area without big trees and a lot of swamps and grass. Not many people lived in that area. The next day, at 7 AM, 12 helicopters carried French parachute troops from Sai Gon carried out the raid on Giong Dinh. Waiting for the enemy to come closer around 30 meters, the Tran Phu battalion opened fire and then engaged in close combat. As a result, the battalion could destroy more than 2 platoons and got 10 rifles from the enemy. Therefore, the enemy's plot to carry out the raid against the commanding committee at Giong Dinh was unsuccessful and had to stop its operation. Some newspapers in Sai Gon at that time published news on their first page, reporting the Giong Dinh battle, "the French troops [were] faced

with professional Viet Minh soldiers, rather well-equipped and had a lot of machine-guns. Normally, Viet Minh soldiers opened fire and then escaped but this battalion used machine guns and engaged in close combat...” (Le Quoc San, 1989b: 88-90).

Then, the Tran Phu battalion moved to Sa Dec (Dong Thap Province nowadays) to fight the French. Another glorious feat of arms was the Chan Dung battle. Chan Dung was a small canal six kilometers long. The people's houses were about four kilometers from the canal. The French troops carried out the raid on this canal. The French troops attacked the canal with artillery support from Long Xuyen, An Giang Province, and also from a warship on the Hau River. The Tran Phu battalion fought bravely and destroyed one French battalion and got a lot of rifles. Two French prisoners of war who were interrogated said that they were from the famous multi-battalion NYO of the French colonialists. The victory at Chan Dung was a big honor for the Tran Phu battalion because they could destroy a professional multi-battalion and made the enemy frightened. Within three years of fighting in the Sa Dec front, nearly 300 soldiers passed away in Sa Dec and won a lot of battles and contributed their great part to the victory against the French.

The last unit to go back to Vietnam was the battalion Cuu Long II. This battalion was set up on May 16 1947. With 280 well-equipped soldiers, this battalion went back to Ha Tien on November 7 1947. After 25 hard days, they arrived at Vinh Te canal-interwar zone IX on December 1, 1947. On the way

back to Vietnam, they fought many battles and killed a lot of enemies and got many rifles. Then, this battalion moved to Bac Lieu Province, interwar zone IX (now it is divided into two provinces: Bac Lieu and Ca Mau). The battalion as well as the local army and the militia fought many battles and killed many enemies especially the reactionary Caodaists and the French. Thus, the battalions got a lot of rifles and the liberated areas were consolidated and strengthened. (Dao Manh Due, 1997: 161). One of the most glorious victories of the Cuu Long II battalion was the victory against the French at Vinh Hung crossroads, Hong Dan District, Rach Gia Province (it is now Vinh Hung village, Vinh Loi district, Bac Lieu Province). On September 23, 1948, the French and Vietnamese lackey troops raided Vinh Hung village with one battalion. They also had the warship with 105 mm gun, 81 mm mortars which entered Vinh Hung along Vinh Hung canal. On September 29, 1948, as the enemy cruised along the Vinh Hung canal, the battalion Cuu Long II waited until they were about 50 meters; then, the battalion Cuu Long II opened fire and killed a lot of enemies. The fight lasted from 9 AM to 11 AM and there were many deaths and injuries on the enemy's side. Therefore, they had to retreat. The result of the battle was that nearly 180 were killed and injured; the battalion got a lot of weapons. Therefore, the battalion could stop the enemy to carry out the raid against the liberated area. The victory had deep meaning because the enemy usually carried out the raids in this area and caused a lot of troubles to the normal people. As a

result, the people in this area were pleased with the glorious feat of arms of battalion Cuu Long II.

All in all, the four battalions including youths of Viet Kieu from Thailand and Laos went back to the south of Vietnam to answer the holy call of the motherland. When putting their feet on the motherland, everyone was welcomed warmly and taken care of by the people and soldiers in the south as their children by birth. They lived and fought with the people there and made very good impressions on the locals. Moreover, the soldiers from those battalions fought very bravely to make the enemy frightened and were also the pride of thousands of Viet Kieu in Thailand. Many soldiers passed away for the cause of independence of the motherland when they were too young. On their way back to the motherland, they had to suffer from many difficulties, such as thirst, danger, tiredness, hunger and sacrifices. Furthermore, many soldiers passed away even when their Vietnamese was not yet fluent; it was their patriotic love that empowered them to reach their ideals.

4.2.2 Weapons

When World War II ended, the DRV's representatives came to Thailand to buy and transport arms to Vietnam. There were many reasons for the success of those figures. First, they had the trust of people in the northeast of Thailand, who helped in smuggling arms to Vietnam. Second, they still had thousands of Viet Kieu who could help them to buy and transport arms to Vietnam. Finally, the DRV's

representatives had good relations with the Seri Thai leaders, the Royal Thai Army, Navy and the Thai Police. The good thing here was that the Thai government in this period kept blind eyes to the clandestine activities of the DRV's figures in Thailand. Moreover, the Seri Thai leaders such as Tiang Sirikhan, Chamlong Daoruang and Thong-In Phuriphat gave a helping hand to arms-buying missions of the DRV's figures (Goscha, 1999: 186).

One of the most notable figures from the DRV was Tran Van Giau. He was the representative of the Ministry of Defense. His mission in Thailand was not only to buy arms and transport them to Vietnam but also to encourage the formation of the overseas battalions to be sent to the western front in southern Vietnam to fight the French. For instance, he was the one who granted the flag with the name "Chi Doi Tran Phu" to the Tran Phu battalion on the day the battalion went back to Vietnam to fight the French. Furthermore, Tran Van Giau was a very important person in the arms purchase mission of the DRV. According to Goscha (1999: 186), Tran Van Giau had a remarkable saying: "buying arms in Thailand was as easy as buying beer!"

Another key figure was Vu Huu Binh who was fluent in both Thai and Lao. Thanks to his fluency in these two languages and his service and networking within both the Royal Thai Army and the Seri Thai during the war, he became an invaluable link between the Viet Minh and a broad section of Thai officialdom in charge of these arms. He had close cooperation with Tiang Sirikhan, the Minister

of Commerce and Industry. Tiang was the one who introduced Vu Huu Binh to arms dealers and thanks to him Vu Huu Binh could meet Pridi Banomyong. Therefore, given his relations with the Royal Thai Army and the Seri Thai, he became an essential link for the DRV to many officials responsible for arms.

Last but not least, another special figure was the monk Bao An who played a crucial role in arms purchases in Thailand. According to Goscha (1999: 209), Bao An was not only a widely respected religious leader in Bangkok, but also one of the five most important members of the DRV'S delegation in Thailand, and one of best arms dealers the Viet Minh had in Southeast Asia. There were many reasons why he became a successful arms dealer. First, he had Thai nationality, which helped him enjoy all the legal rights of a Thai. Second, Thailand is a Buddhist country, so the monk was highly respected in Thai society. As a result, Thai authorities did not risk causing any trouble for him, which might result in a public outcry against them. Third, he had been staying in Thailand for a long time and could speak Thai. Thus, it was easy for him to handle all aspects of Thai society. Finally, he had good contacts with local authorities; therefore, he was in an ideal position to do clandestine jobs for the DRV in Thailand. During his 1949 voyage to Bangkok, Nguyen Thanh Son went to the Nang Loeng temple to discuss with Bao An the reorganization of supply operations to Nam Bo or southern Vietnam. As a consequence, the temple served as a perfect meeting place for the DRV figures in arms procurements and

transport. Bao An directed liaisons and transactions with Thai and Chinese arms dealers. Bao An was the buyer for the “Hong Kong They,” a Chinese supply house. Arms procured via this company were transported by canal to Nang Loeng. Then, Duong Van Phuc and Bao An arranged their arms deals.

Beside those important figures, other Vietnamese in Thailand, especially the Vietnamese communities in the northeast, also played an essential role in the arms supply networks of the DRV thanks to their cultural and linguistic assets and hands-on geographical knowledge of the region.

Again according to Goscha (1999: 213), in addition to the four main battalions sent to the western front, in 1946, DRV representatives also formed two more combined supply-combat groups: the Mekong I and the Mekong II. Mekong I was based on the sea route to transport the weapons along the coast of Cambodia to Nam Bo. Mekong II was based on the land route from the south of Tonle Sap to Pursat and Battambang in Cambodia. From there, they went on to Kompong Thom and reached Nam Bo by canals. Totally, around 300 personnel participated in these supply networks. In addition, at the end of 1947, two major supply routes running to Vietnam were used to carry arms and supplies out from Thailand to Vietnam. The first one was the lower Indochinese route crossing Cambodia and the Gulf of Thailand by land and sea routes, and the second was the upper Indochinese route running from Udon Thani across Laos to interwar zone IV in

Nghe An, Ha Tinh and Thanh Hoa Provinces (Goscha. 1999: 207).

The sea routes

This was a very important route and to some extent safer than other kinds of transportation during the war. Goscha (1999: 209) has pointed out that this route was from Bangkok to southern Cambodia by way of the islands of Phu Quoc and Koh Kut, through the canal of Rach Gia, Ca Mau and Bac Lieu and from there up the Vietnamese coast to southern Chinese entrepots, Hong Kong, and across to the island of Hainan. Beside the Vietnamese junks, they also rented the Chinese, Siamese and Hainanese to take part in this route.

There were two important sea routes to transport arms and supplies to Vietnam. The first one was the “off-shore route,” which relied on motorized junks operating under the cover of the night. Junks left the coast, dashing through the web of canal openings on either side of the Ca Mau isthmus. For the shore routes, shallow-draught crafts including sampans were used to hug the Cambodian coast by night (Goscha, 1999: 212). Then, agents used canals near Rach Gia to transport arms and equipment through the interior waterways to waiting troops scattered across Nam Bo. Goscha (1999: 214) has given the amount of weapons passing through the western part of Cambodia from Thailand as 12 tons a month and the maritime routes accounted for nearly 80 per cent of the total traffic between Siam and southern Indochina. All together these shipments

accounted for around 576 tons of war supplies that reached southern Vietnam from Thailand every year by sea.

From 1946 to the mid of 1950, the DRV's representatives received full support from Thai officials especially the pro-Seri Thai navy, coast guards and customs services. The Vietnamese could cross Thai waters without interference and could also fly a Thai flag to avoid French spies.

The land routes

This kind of transportation received a lot of help from Thai officials, especially those belonging to the Seri Thai group. One good example of this type of arms trafficking for the DRV representatives was to rent Thai airplanes in order to transport gold, opium and other goods from Indochina to other countries in Southeast Asia for sale. So, they could use the profits from those goods to buy weapons, ammunition, medicines and equipment. They also hired Thai pilots and cared for the pilots' families in case they had fatal accidents (Goscha, 1999: 216). Train was another popular means of transporting arms and equipment. For this kind of transportation, the Vietnamese also received a lot of help from Thai officials who arranged the trains as well as escorted them to the Thai frontier towns such as Ubon Ratchathani and Surin without any inspection from the border authorities (Goscha, 1999: 215).

More interestingly, the DRV's representatives also used elephants to transport arms from Thailand, across Cambodia to Nam Bo. They sent two to three

caravans a year and each elephant could carry from 150 to 200 kilograms of supplies. In fact, it was a dangerous kind of transportation because it was easily suppressed by the French along the way. In addition, Goscha (1999: 215) also stated that from 1949 to 1950, the overland transport contributed 13 tons of materials to Nam Bo each month and 156 tons annually.

Recalling the time of helping the Vietnamese with arms purchases in Thailand in 1950, Police Major General Chana Samutvanich said, "I stayed on deck throughout the journey and was truly unaware of what was kept in the hold underneath. My orders were to see to the safe passage of the boat beyond Pak Nam, to clear up any misunderstandings in case of an encounter with police along the way." (Cited in Goscha, 1999: 210). As a result, with help from Thai officials, all of the cases of transporting arms to Vietnam were successful.

4.2.3 Money

In order to have money for their operations and money to support their bases in Thailand and also dispatches of men and supplies to Vietnam, the General Association initiated a lot of programs to collect money among Viet Kieu. According to Goscha (1999: 201), one of the most noticeable activities was a 20-baht "aid to national defense" tax levied monthly on thousands of Vietnamese in Thailand. Furthermore, Chan Ansuchote (1960: 84) states that every member of the Association was

forced to pay a monthly contribution of two baht.¹⁶ In addition, the Association undertook more activities, especially on important national days to raise donations from Viet Kieu every year. On this occasion, the activities were carried out overtly in front of everybody and it was up to people's abilities. Then, the money was sent to the DRV in Ha Noi through responsible leaders from the Association.¹⁷ Furthermore, Nguyen Thanh Van et al (2001: 58) have also added that Viet Kieu also supported the golden week with jewelry, even "marriage rings," and bought assistance War government bonds of the DRV in order to support the war effort in Vietnam financially. More interestingly, even though Viet Kieu in Thailand had many difficulties, they still devoted all their efforts by sending the money back to the banks in Vietnam to support the motherland.¹⁸ Le Manh Trinh concluded that Viet Kieu donations in Thailand reached 3 million baht each year or around 12 million Indochinese Piasters (Goscha. 1999: 202).

4.3 Conclusion

Evidently, the Viet Kieu community in the northeast of Thailand played a crucial role in the victory of the DRV against the French. Even though they were away from their country, they all thought

¹⁶ However, from the interview with Mr. Nguyen Xuan Khien in Nakhon Phanom, Viet Kieu paid a monthly contribution of 10 baht.

¹⁷ Interview with Mr. Chau Kim Quoi (Bangkok)

¹⁸ Interview with Pham Duc Minh (Udon Thani)

of their origins and devoted all their abilities to the motherland. As a consequence, they organized many patriotic activities in order to support the war efforts in Vietnam and also transformed Thailand into a base for military training, arms purchases and other necessary operations. From Thailand, thousands of Vietnamese soldiers and weapons went back to the western front in the south of Vietnam to fight the French. As a result, they were an indispensable force that contributed their abilities to the victory of the Vietnamese at Dien Bien Phu against the French and brought to an end of the First Indochina War.

Beside the Vietnamese in the northeast, the DRV's representatives also had good connections with the Seri Thai high ranking officials and Pridi Banomyong, who helped them in arms purchases in Thailand as well as elsewhere in the region. In fact, Thai officials, especially those in the Seri Thai group, made good conditions for the DRV's representatives to transport arms and played an important role in the supply networks of the DRV. For instance, they arranged boats, trains, and even airplanes to transport weapons from Thailand to Indochina. This reflected the close cooperation between the Vietnamese and the Thais in the Post-WW II period.

The above discussion has shown that the roles of the Vietnamese community in the northeast of Thailand were critical to the supply networks of the DRV. This chapter has provided an explanation for the contributions of the Vietnamese community in Thailand and their interactions with Thai officials,

especially those in the Seri Thai group, in two different periods, i.e. 1946-1947 and 1948-1954. The discussion in this chapter has touched upon several issues, namely, the relations between the Thais and the Vietnamese; the policies of the Thai government in each period; the influence of external powers on the Thai government, and how relations between the Thais and the Vietnamese were affected by the Thai government's policies during these two periods.

5**CONSEQUENCES
FOR VIETNAMESE-THAI RELATIONS**

The relations between the Vietnamese and the Thais changed dramatically following the changes in Thai politics from 1946-1954. The change of government from Pridi Banomyong to Phibun Songkhram brought about important change in Thai-Vietnamese relations. In fact, at the beginning of the First Indochina War, relations between the Thais and the Vietnamese were generally good as a result of the Pridi Banomyong government's policy towards the Indochinese countries. The policy influenced the viewpoints of the Thais in general and the Thais in the northeast in particular. However, everything changed dramatically after P. Phibun Songkhram came to power in 1948. This was a turning point in Thai-Vietnamese relations.

The change in Thai policy was significantly influenced by the United States intervention in Southeast Asia. The new policy following the US anti-communist line seriously affected the Vietnamese in Thailand and, as a consequence, soured Thai-Vietnamese relations. This period also witnessed Thailand being increasingly involved in the Cold War conflict in this region. The country became a base for great powers to compete for influence in the region. As a result, Thailand moved

strongly to the western camp with her foreign policy closely falling into line with that of the United States.

This chapter focuses on the shift in Thai foreign policy and its impact on the relations between the Thais and the Vietnamese. In doing this, the chapter examines the influence of external powers on Thai foreign and domestic policies during this turbulent period in the world politics.

5.1 Pridi Banomyong Period (1946-1947)

5.1.1 Pridi Banomyong's Foreign Policy

Thailand's foreign policy in the post-World War II period changed directions many times in order to keep up with changing political situations internally and externally. The two main objectives of Thailand's diplomatic activities were to preserve its national independence and restore its international status and to become the leader of the emerging nations in Southeast Asia (Liang Chi Shad, 1977: 3-4). In order to gain international status, Thai leaders tried to have good relations with big countries around the world to gain their support for Thai membership into the United Nations. Under the leadership of Pridi Banomyong, Thailand made good friends with all countries around the world, especially those in the west after the Second World War. The UN membership became their key to winning international recognition and assistance.

From the last years of the Second World War, the Free Thai Movement had close working relations with anti-French and anti-Japanese groups in

Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. These connections had broadened with the rise of Pridi Banomyong in the immediate post-war period. By 1947 the Cambodian, Lao and Vietnamese nationalist movements had established information and arms-procurement offices in Bangkok. After the Second World War, thanks to the close relations between the Seri Thai leaders led by Pridi Banomyong and the Allies, especially the United States, Thailand did not have to meet the fate of a country that had lost the war. The Thai government of this period kept good relations with western powers but they did not depend on or follow them.

In order to become a member of the United Nations, Thailand had to make some concessions to the British and the French in terms of territorial disputes. One typical example was on November 17, 1946, when Thailand returned disputed areas to Laos and Cambodia in order to gain French support for its application for the United Nations membership. Thailand nevertheless did not risk recognizing the DRV officially and support the Vietnamese revolution overtly. Moreover, it was also reluctant to join the Southeast Asian League suggested by the Viet Minh. According to Goscha (1999: 238), Thailand did not recognize the DRV but still supported the DRV by allowing the Ho Chi Minh-led government to establish a diplomatic office in Bangkok, known as the representative office of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Moreover, the Thai government allowed the Vietnamese to open a Vietnam news service on 543 Silom Road. This

showed that the Thais sympathized with the Vietnamese in their fight against the colonialists.

After the end of the Second World War, Thailand wanted to become the center of Southeast Asia. This was a good time for Indochinese patriots to fight the French because of the enthusiastic help from the Thai government. The Thai government also showed its opposition to the French colonialists by providing bases and weapons for the Vietnamese to train soldiers and also asylum for the Vietnamese evacuated from Laos. Thailand in this period was a gate for Indochinese countries to reach other countries in the region and beyond for their struggle against the French.

Nuechterlein (1965: 95) stated that in September 1947, some high-ranking officials expressed their support for a Southeast Asian League, a short-lived regional front organization against colonialism sponsored by the Viet Minh. Various Thai politicians also approached Vietnamese, Laotians, Indonesians and other leaders in an attempt to work out a political structure for the area. In fact, in 1947, Pridi Banomyong organized a Southeast Asia League in Bangkok whose participants included a number of his followers, as well as exiled leaders from neighboring countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Burma, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines who wanted to expel the colonial powers from their homelands. According to Goscha (1999: 261), the president of the central executive committee of the League was Tiang Sirikhan. The vice president was Tran Van Giau.

That these two key leaders assumed leadership positions in the League showed that it was largely a DRV-Seri Thai creation. Furthermore, Pridi Banomyong allowed the League to be based in Bangkok and provided it with initial start-up funds.

In adopting such an anti-colonialist policy, Pridi Banomyong intended to maintain close cooperation with the emerging states of Southeast Asia. However, before he could put his policy into effect, in the autumn of 1947, a coup d'état forced him to go into exile.

5.1.2 Thai Government's Help towards Viet Kieu

The Thakhek incident on March 21, 1946 marked the return of the French to Laos with ruthless suppression in the border towns along the Mekong River opposite the northeast of Thailand. As a result of this incident, approximately 50,000 Vietnamese fled their homes and sought refuge in the border provinces in the northeast of Thailand. Fortunately, those refugees received sympathy and warm help not only from the Thai government but also from the locals. When the Vietnamese swam across the Mekong River to the northeast of Thailand to avoid ruthless suppression, Thai people used small boats to pick up those people.¹⁹ Furthermore, according to Thanyathip Sripana (2006), the locals also provided them with accommodation, especially the space in

¹⁹ Interview with Mr. Thawi Sawangpanyangkoon, an eighty three year old Viet Kieu in Bangkok

the basements of their houses, clothes, medicine, and other basic necessities. Therefore, the Vietnamese expressed their deep gratitude to the locals. The Thai government permitted them to reside temporarily in Thailand. Chan Ansuchote (1960) cited a telegram sent from the Ministry of Interior to the governor of Nong Khai on November 21, 1945,

“Should Vietnamese, Lao or Cambodian refugees seek refuge in Thailand to escape French oppression, they shall be allowed to enter at their own free will. They shall not be turned back or subjected to compulsory payment of fees or any alien registration procedure. But their movements should be watched.”

Therefore, those refugees could enter Thailand freely without any obstacles just with their names recorded by Thai border officers. Moreover, the Thai government offered them an opportunity to become eligible for Thai citizenship, provided them with land, and did not control them but gave them the rights to travel, reside and work anywhere they wanted. At that time, Pridi Banomyong, the Thai Prime Minister, offered the Vietnamese refugees dwellings, food, medicines, land and jobs, especially in construction work such as building and repairing roads, as well as other activities including preparation of charcoals and agricultural cultivation (Thanyathip Sripana, 2006: 4). For instance, the Thai government started the construction of the

Mukdahan-Sakon Nakhon road, which provided employment to thousands of Vietnamese. The road construction was an actual sign of the generosity of the Pridi Banomyong government and also a sign of the gratitude of Vietnamese migrants toward both the Thai people and the Thai government led by Pridi Banomyong (Trinh Dieu Thin, 2002: 5).

Moreover, the generosity of the Thai government was also evident in a loan of about one million baht to the Vietnamese refugees so that they could start earning their living (Chan Ansuchote, 1960: 8).²⁰ The loan was crucial to the improvement of economic conditions of the Vietnamese in the initial years. Thus, with the help of this loan, they were able to develop their livelihood and improve their standards of living so that they were equal to, or even higher than, those of the local Thais. Moreover, the Thai government also provided good conditions for the Vietnamese to become regular immigrants by complying with the provisions of the Immigration Act.

After settling in Thailand, in spite of help from the Thai people and the Thai government, the lives of the Vietnamese were still very difficult. Some earned their living as hawkers, traveling from village to village, from town to town, from province to province, carrying with them heavy loads of goods such as agricultural tools, food, rice, simple consumer products, etc. Others had to walk from Nakhon Phanom to Sakon Nakhon (100 kilometers), but along the way they received help from Thais who

²⁰ However, from the interviews with Viet Kieu in Udon Thani and Nakhon Phanom, they refused this idea.

offered them water and food (Thanyathip Sripana 2006: 5). By the beginning of 1947, Viet Kieu's lives had become stable and they adapted themselves gradually to their new lifestyles. In towns, those families who had funds and occupational expertise hired houses to open shops such as tailors, bicycle fixing shops, selling *pho*, coffee, breakfast, sticky rice, sugar soup, porridge at markets or sell goods at the bus station. In small districts, besides making handicraft products and selling junk food in towns, most Viet Kieu lived on exchanging goods with Thai people. They bought goods that Thai people needed such as needles, threads, cakes, betel and areca nuts, garments, etc., and carried them to the remote villages to exchange for rice, eggs, chickens, ducks, and the like. In harvest time, they worked for the locals to earn money (Hoang Van Hoan et al, 1978: 51).

The refugees fled to the northeast of Thailand suddenly, so they could not bring any materials, tools or property with them. However, they could start earning a living thanks to loans from the Thai government. They could choose their own trade and get involved in Thai economic life quickly and successfully. The good news was that there were no economic discriminations against the Vietnamese refugees from either the government or the Thai people. In fact, they were welcomed to reside in the northeast of Thailand, which lagged behind other regions in Thailand in terms of economic development. As a result, the Vietnamese refugees brought

essential skills and business ideas to develop this remote area.

Chan Ansuchote (1960: 12) explained the Pridi Banomyong government's sympathy to the Vietnamese refugees by pointing out that in addition to its humanitarianism, the Thai government believed that, like the Vietnamese who had come to Thailand in earlier periods, the new migrants would be law-abiding people and return home when the situation returned to normalcy.

Furthermore, the government supported the Vietnamese because it believed that the Thais shared the Vietnamese antagonism towards the French. For instance, the Thais had the experience of being bullied by the French over territorial disputes in Laos and Cambodia and forced to sign unequal treaties with France. In addition, Pridi Banomyong also had good relations with President Ho Chi Minh because they shared the same viewpoints in liberating Indochinese countries from the French colonialists. Hence, he established the "Southeast Asian League" in which Thailand played a leading role in order to help the nationalist movements in the region, especially in Indochinese countries, in their fight against the French.

5.1.3 People to People Relationship in Pridi Banomyong Period

The relations between the Thais and the Vietnamese had been formed since the Vietnamese community was established in Thailand in the 17th

century. The relationship had been increasingly consolidated through time and became more cordial when the new Vietnamese migrants fled to the northeast of Thailand from Laos following the Thakhek incident. Before 1946, the Vietnamese community in Thailand had already established their patriotic movements and received sympathy from both the locals and the Thai government in the 1920s and 1930s. This period witnessed the strong patriotic activities of Mr. Dang Thuc Hua, Ms. Dang Quynh Anh or Madame Nho, Phan Boi Chau and many other patriots. These important figures established close relations with the Thais as well as other aliens, and they lived in harmony in their communities. Therefore, they did not feel cold in a foreign country like Thailand. They created the foundation for the friendship between the Thais and the Vietnamese in later periods.

There are many stories related to the relations between the Thais and the Vietnamese. Son Tung (1993: 170) told a moving story about cordial relations between Madame Nho and the Thais in her neighborhood. When she left her house many days for the district headquarters to be investigated, two Thai girls from her neighborhood came to keep her house for her. When she came back home, her heart became warmer with the presence of these two girls. When hugging these girls, she remembered the teaching of Thau Chin, the alias of Ho Chi Minh when he was in Thailand: “we are living in their country; if we win their hearts, it means that we have our motherland.”

This example shows that close relations arose from their daily-life activities. Madame Nho also recalled, “Thais and other alien families help me, some give me money, and some give me materials...therefore, I can build a new house very quickly to bring up children” (cited in Son Tung, 1993: 112). The Vietnamese in Thailand in general and in the northeast in particular always tried to make friends with Thai families in order to have a shelter when having problems in daily life as the Vietnamese saying “a stranger nearby is better than a relative who lives far away.”

When the new Vietnamese came to Thailand after the Second World War, the good impression with the Vietnamese made Thai people show their generous help to the Vietnamese. As a result, their relations became more and more cordial. With help from the Thais, the Vietnamese could overcome all the initial difficulties to stabilize their lives and therefore, they showed their great gratitude to the Thais. Many cases from the interviews in Nakhon Phanom and Udon Thani by the researcher also showed that even now many old Vietnamese still remember very clearly the generous support from both Thais and the Thai government in the early time when they fled to the northeast of Thailand from Laos. The following are some case studies from the interviews of both Vietnamese and Thais in Nakhon Phanom and Udon Thani.

Case Study 6

Dang Bang is a 79-year-old Viet Kieu from Nakhon Phanom. He still showed his gratitude towards the help from Thai people when he fled from Laos to the northeast of Thailand. At that time, the locals and soldiers went to the Mekong river bank to welcome Viet Kieu and carried food to give to Viet Kieu. Thai people were so kind to help Viet Kieu by using small boats to pick up Viet Kieu swimming across the Mekong to avoid the French slaughter. Moreover, the locals helped the newcomers stabilize their lives by providing food, accommodation and sympathy. As a consequence, this marked the golden age of Thai-Vietnamese relations.

Not only Viet Kieu but also certain Thais remembered their cordial relations with the Vietnamese when they worked together during the First Indochina War. The following case is a typical example of that kind of relationship between the Thais and the Vietnamese in Thailand.

Case Study 7

Suphap Bundon, an 85-year-old Thai in Udon Thani, worked for a tobacco company during the First Indochina War. He worked with hundreds of Viet Kieu and the relations between Viet Kieu and Thais were good because they did not have any problems when living together. He had been living with Viet Kieu for many decades but he had not had any problems with Viet Kieu. He added that under the leadership of P. Phibunsongkhram, the Thai

government carried out the divisive policies to cause hostility between the Thais and Viet Kieu. However, he still considered Viet Kieu as his siblings.

His sentiment towards the Viet Kieu also stemmed from their personality. He was impressed with Viet Kieu because they were very industrious, and good at earning a living. Viet Kieu also made good relations with Thai people by their lifestyles. As a result, Thai people also liked to live with Viet Kieu. Furthermore, he also felt very happy when Viet Kieu could obtain citizenship in Thailand and could have all the rights as Thais to have better living conditions.

From the case study, it is clear that through many ups and downs, the Thais and the Vietnamese are still on good terms even nowadays. The Vietnamese in the northeast of Thailand still show their gratitude to the kind help from the locals. Without help from the locals, they could not have lasted through many years of turbulence.

5.2 P. Phibunsongkhram Period (1948-1954)

5.2.1 The Impacts of External Powers on Thailand's Foreign and Domestic Policies

According to Liang Chi Shad (1977: 6), after P. Phibunsongkhram came to power in April 1948, a pro-western and anti-communist policy was adopted. However, in the early period of his government from 1948 to 1949, he was reluctant to apply overt anti-communist policies because he was afraid that his

country was at risk if he applied those policies without any sure protection from western powers such as the United States or Great Britain.

Liang Chi Shad (1977: 7) has elaborated this point by one example. There was only a tepid response in Bangkok to the Philippine initiative in 1949 for a Pacific (anti-communist) pact. At the end of 1948, Thailand requested the United States to provide her with some arms and equipment for her battalions but Washington hesitated to do this (Liang Chi Shad, 1977: 7). To show its goodwill and also with US pressure, the Thai government did many noticeable things to gain trust from the United States in terms of its anti-communist policy. Most notably, in 1950, the Thai government recognized the Bao Dai government in southern Vietnam and other newly established governments in Laos and Cambodia. (Liang Chi Shad, 1977: 8) In addition, in July 1950 it dispatched 4,000 troops to assist in the US-led military action against the invasion of South Korea by North Korea and donated 40,000 tons of rice for Korean relief in 1951. During July-September 1950, Thailand and the United States signed three cooperation agreements, including a military one, which led to the setting up of an official American mission in Bangkok to provide economic and technical assistance, together with an American military mission to train the Thai armed forces. Hence, by 1951, P. Phibunsongkhram had succeeded in gaining trust from the western powers (Kobkua, 1995: 277).

Furthermore, there were many changes in political situations in Asia in 1950. China had become a communist country and recognized the DRV; so did the Soviet Union. In response, the United States and Great Britain recognized the puppet Bao Dai regime in southern Vietnam. These events brought the Cold War to Southeast Asia: the region was polarized with the United States leading the anti-communist nations and the Soviet Union leading the communist forces. At that time, given its anti-communist stance, Thailand moved to the western camp. In fact, there were many reasons for her decision. First, the United States was a powerful nation that could protect Thailand from communist threats and could support it in terms of military assistance and economic development. Second, with its economic and military might, the United States could enhance Thailand's position in the world.

The year 1950 marked the start of special relations between the United States and Thailand – a relationship that was marked by Thailand's move to support US containment of communism in Southeast Asia. In return, Thailand also received generous economic and military support from the United States. For instance, the US support for Thailand increased from US\$12 million in 1952 to US\$ 55.8 million in 1953 (Kobkua, 1995: 282). Following the US anti-communist policy, the Thai government also asked Vietnam to stop all propaganda activities of resistance war against France in Thailand at the beginning of 1951.

At the end of 1951, the P. Phibunsongkhram government closed the DRV's representative organization and the information office (Hoang Khac Nam, 2007: 54). Furthermore, in August 1952, Thailand further developed her relations with the United States by signing an agreement to allow the latter to build an air base in Thai territory. In November 1952, Thailand issued a new "anti-communist law." In foreign affairs, this was a clear signal of Thailand's opposition to the DRV. In internal affairs, Thailand started to carry out discrimination against and suppression of Viet Kieu (Hoang Khac Nam, 2007: 56).

P. Phibunsongkhram's anti-communist policy and his special relations with the United States came to a head in the signing of the Manila Pact in September 1954, leading to the formation of SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization). His anti-communist policy also meant cutting off contact with the communist world, especially China, and applying anti-communist campaigns in the country (Kobkua, 1995: 282).

There were many reasons for Thailand to join the SEATO, which risked the wrath of China and the communist world. Kobkua (1995: 284) provided two main reasons for this. Firstly, P. Phibunsongkhram understood regional and world politics and also the role of Thailand in that period. Secondly, P. Phibunsongkhram realized that Thailand would not be able to defend herself against a direct attack from the communists led or supported by China, without outside aid. Thus, Thailand tried to cooperate with

the United States to guarantee security for herself. In brief, the membership of SEATO guaranteed Thailand military assistance for her security and economic aid to develop the country.

In order to carry out the anti-communist policy in Thailand, the government applied strict policies towards the Vietnamese community. Those policies caused many hardships to the Vietnamese in terms of not only their spiritual lives but also their material ones. Moreover, the government had the ideas to repatriate all the Vietnamese in Thailand to Vietnam in order to reduce the impact of the spread of communism.

In fact, there are many reasons for the changes in Thai foreign and domestic policies. The most notable reason for this change of Thai foreign policy was the influence of the United States and its containment doctrine. The United States urged the Thai government to recognize the Bao Dai regime in southern Vietnam. Moreover, according to Hoang Khac Nam (2007: 54), the United States felt disappointed with Thailand's ambiguous policy towards the "two Vietnams"; therefore, in early 1951 the Americans insisted that P. Phibunsongkhram "expel" the president of the DRV's Southeast Asian delegation, Nguyen Duc Quy, because he was "so useful to the Viet Minh in Thailand," and because this was also a symbol of Thai hospitality to Viet Minh agents. In order to please the United States, Thailand had to move against the DRV – an action considered by the United States as a sign of good faith for the continuation of military aid.

In order to stop the spread of communism to Southeast Asia, the United States developed Thailand as an “anti-communist bastion” in order to contain communism and expand its influence in this region. The United States also used SEATO as a tool to defend Thailand and started to build strategic roads through the northeast, upgrade ports and airfields for military use, and launch a program of psychological warfare aimed at both peasants and officials (Cited in Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker, 2005: 146).

Furthermore, Thailand aligned itself with the United States in order to gain economic and military aid. After recognizing anti-communist Bao Dai in March 1950, the Thai government was rewarded with US\$15 million US assistance. In July 1950, when Thailand sent troops to South Korea in support of the US-led military mission, P. Phibunsongkhram told parliament that, “by sending just a small number of troops as a token of our friendship, we will get various things in return” (Cited in Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker, 2005: 144). Hence, the following month, the US provided US\$10 million in economic aid, the World Bank gave a US\$25 million loan, and arms supplies started arriving. Wyatt (1984: 272) added that from 1951 to 1957, Thailand received US\$ 149 million in economic aid and US\$ 222 million in military aid. The aid helped Thailand develop fast during this tumultuous period of Southeast Asia, especially by helping cover the annual national budget about US\$ 200 million in the early 1950s.

In addition to the influence of the United States, the victory of communism in China must have had some impact on Thai foreign policy. In 1949, the communist regime was established in China, and this created concern among Thai leaders who were aware of the close connection, including military cooperation, between China and North Vietnam. Thus, the Thai government at that time had reason to worry about a possible Sino-Vietnamese communist alliance following the victory of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In fact, the DRV established its diplomatic relations with the socialist countries and started to receive the aid from those countries. Hence, after the border campaign in 1950, the concern of the Thai government became more serious (Hoang Khac Nam, 2007: 55). In addition, according to Somsak Rakwijit (1966: 164), when China set up a “Thai autonomous people’s government” in Yunnan on January 31, 1953, Thailand was alarmed at a possible threat from communist China, and the Chinese community in Thailand was also targeted as an internal threat to Thai national security. As a consequence, the Thai military and political leaders, who were most concerned about these threats, were strongly opposed to both China and the DRV.

In internal politics, the P. Phibunsongkhram government harshly suppressed its civilian rivals, especially those belonging to the opposition party and related to Pridi Banomyong. Northeast Thai politicians such as Tiang Sirikhan and Thong-in Phuriphat were targets of the Thai police. Thong-in

and two others were shot to death while escaping from the police in March 1949, and at the end of 1952 Tiang Sirikhan suffered the same fate (Wyatt, 1984: 267). Moreover, with the new anti-communist law, 37 Thai citizens were jailed, together with a number of journalists, the president of the leftist labor federation, and several members of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). The main leftist newspapers and bookshops were closed down. In December 1952, another prominent pro-Pridi Banomyong MP and four other men were strangled, burnt, and buried by Police General Phao Sriyanond's police (Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker, 2005: 145). In March 1953, a leftist newspaper publisher was shot on his honeymoon. In 1954, another pro-Pridi Banomyong MP was strangled and dumped in the Chao Phraya River tied to a concrete post. Phao gave the police a motto: "There is nothing under the sun that the Thai police cannot do" (Cited in Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker, 2005: 146).

Furthermore, in order to help the United States disseminate its propaganda, the Thai government published a lot of books to praise its ally as the richest and most "civilized" nation that was "peace-loving," "full of generosity," and ready to aid countries around the world. The psychological war units under the label "peace units" approached villages, pagodas, and lived with monks and the Thai people to create solidarity and friendliness between Americans and Thais, as well as admiration for the United States (Hoang Van Hoan et al, 1978: 45). At the same time a lot of anti-communist propaganda

materials were produced, spreading information that communism banned religion, destroyed pagodas, shared wives and husbands, forced people to work hard and eat little, and created hunger and coldness (Hoang Van Hoan et al, 1978: 45). Such propaganda would make Thai people afraid of communism in order to follow the United States. It also misinformed the Thais about Vietnam's intention to invade Thailand, and the United States would come to help Thai people fight communism.

These propaganda campaigns painted a bad picture of both Vietnam and Viet Kieu. For example, Vietnam followed communism; therefore, France fought Vietnam to destroy communism. Viet Kieu in Thailand also followed communism and would do harmful things to Thai people. The aims of these propagandas were to encourage the Thais to boycott Viet Kieu and even to use violence against them. Besides, newspapers that praised the United States and said bad things about communism were delivered to villages and forced village leaders to read for Thai people. Village leaders must study lessons of anti-communism once a week. In their lessons, they not only learned anti-communist ideas but also about Vietnam and Viet Kieu (Hoang Van Hoan et al, 1978: 45).

Furthermore, the Thai government also allowed the Bao Dai puppet embassy to establish the information offices in provinces where Viet Kieu resided. These offices disseminated information on the policies of the United States, the regime in southern Vietnam and also bought off some Viet

Kieu. The offices also served as headquarters for spies to observe Viet Kieu's activities and report them to the Thai police. To sum up, the anti-communist elements in Thailand conspired to destroy the patriotic activities of Viet Kieu in support of both the US anti-communist policy and the regime in southern Vietnam (Hoang Van Hoan et al, 1978: 46).

5.2.2 P. Phibunsongkhram's Policies towards the Viet Kieu in Thailand

Under the leadership of Pridi Banomyong, the Viet Kieu in Thailand were fully supported in both their patriotic movements and their daily life. However, under the leadership of P. Phibunsongkhram, they suffered from his discriminatory as well as anti-communist policies. There were several reasons for P. Phibunsongkhram's harsh policy towards the Vietnamese community. First, according to Thanyathip Sripana and Trinh Dieu Thin (2006: 156), the Vietnamese in the northeast of Thailand were a very strong force that supported the DRV and were considered a threat to Thai national security. Second, the Vietnamese in the northeast as well as the DRV's representatives at the representative office in Bangkok had close relations with the Seri Thai, especially Pridi Banomyong. Moreover, the support from China for the DRV in its fight against the French in Vietnam also impacted the Vietnamese communities in the northeast of Thailand.

When Field Marshal P. Phibunsongkhram came to power as Prime Minister in 1948, he changed Thai foreign policies by allying Thailand with the United States and following its anti-communist policy in Southeast Asia. This made Thailand an enemy of Indochinese countries (Boonsanong Punyodyana, 1974: 21). In order to please the United States, P. Phibunsongkhram recognized the Bao Dai puppet regime in the south of Vietnam with the hope that Washington would supply Thailand with US\$ 75 million economic assistance under the economic and technical cooperation agreement of September 1950 and the military cooperation agreement of October 1950 (Thanyathip Sripana and Trinh Dieu Thin, 2006: 158). Furthermore, the Thai government also “prosecuted any journalist who ‘reports news aimed at provoking unrest in the country in accordance with communist principles’” (cited in Fineman, 1993: 224).

At the end of June 1948, the P. Phibunsongkhram government started rumors in newspapers accusing Viet Kieu of committing breaches of public security, thievery, murder, and the like. It also undertook a survey of public opinion for the suppression and prohibition of all the patriotic activities of Viet Kieu who had a liking for the liberal line of Pridi Banomyong’s party and for the Thai Communist Party (Hoang Van Hoan et al, 1978: 30). The policies of the Thai government towards the Vietnamese began to harden from 1949 onward. On April 7, 1949, the Ministry of the Interior issued new

rules and regulations in order to impose tighter and more effective control over the Vietnamese community. “We are in need of some means of controlling these immigrants, as Thailand is now in the midst of a general disorder. As such is the case, it is feared that the immigrants may take advantage of the situation to introduce communism to and cause disturbances in the country” (cited in Chan Ansuchote, 1960: 13).

Hence, the government started to keep the Vietnamese in restricted areas without any concern for their jobs or their places of residence. On April 18, 1949, the Thai government decided to move the Vietnamese refugees to 13 border provinces such as Chiang Rai, Nan, Uttaradit, Loei, Ubon Ratchathani, Nong Khai, Nakhon Phanom, Buri Ram, Si Sa Ket, Surin, Prachin Buri, Chanthaburi and Trat. The refugees were issued special identification papers without subjecting them to the payment of fees (Chan Ansuchote, 1960: 15). This order caused a lot of troubles for the Vietnamese. Unable to find good jobs in the northeast, some Viet Kieu had moved to different provinces to earn a living. Moreover, after they had stabilized their lives, they had certain properties such as houses, lands, shops, enterprises, among others. To follow the government’s order, they had to sell their properties at low prices in order to keep up with the time to move. This badly impacted their daily lives.

Furthermore, Chan Ansuchote (1960: 15) added that the government continued a more serious move against the Vietnamese when it issued a new

order in 1950 to concentrate the locations of Viet Kieu to just five provinces, namely, Nong Khai, Sakon Nakhon, Nakhon Phanom, Ubon Ratchathani and Prachin Buri. Within one month, they had to carry out this order. Viet Kieu were thus in a miserable situation. Vu Manh Hung et al (1976: 63) gave an example of the damages suffered by Viet Kieu. That is, the leaders of the northeastern region ordered Viet Kieu to estimate their damages and, according to the unofficial statistics, the damages to only 3,005 families in 10 places amounted to 15,083,861 baht. P. Phibunsongkhram's plan was to move Viet Kieu out of Bangkok and Udon Thani, the two centers where the patriotic movements were mobilized, and then moved all Viet Kieu to the five provinces in order to control them easily. In doing this, they would prevent the spread of Viet Kieu's influence to Thai people; and by causing hardships in their economic lives, they would force Viet Kieu to follow the puppet embassy of southern Vietnam (Hoang Van Hoan et al et al, 1978: 54). The places where Viet Kieu were concentrated are shown in the following map:

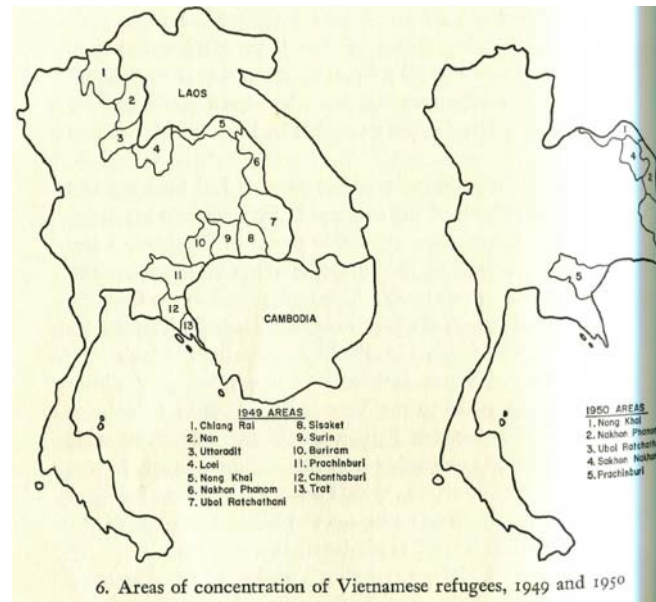


Figure 6: Concentration of Viet Kieu
(Vietnamese refugees in Thailand)
Source: Poole (1970)

The northeastern provinces such as Nong Khai, Ubon Ratchathani, Sakon Nakhon, and Prachin Buri were at that time among the poorest in Thailand. After the evacuation, they could not find jobs in those provinces; they had actually moved to other provinces because of this reason. Now they had to move back, what should they do to earn a living? (Nguyen Thanh Van et al, 2001: 69). One of the most miserable cases was that of male youths getting married to Thai women and having children. Now the government asked them to move, and if they brought their wives and children with them, they

could not see a bright future. Therefore, they had to leave their family to follow the government's policies.

Having concentrated Viet Kieu in five provinces, the Thai government started to control Viet Kieu seriously. On April 30, 1951, the Police Department issued the "rules for control of Vietnamese refugees" to collect information, file reports, keep records and draft rules and regulations to control the Vietnamese. "Heads of Vietnamese families were made responsible for the behavior of their families, and headmen were selected to do the same for several families. A census was to be taken of the refugees, and detailed information was to be collected about the names, birth dates, relatives, education, skills, occupations and residences" (Cited in Chan Ansuchote, 1960: 18). Therefore, the Vietnamese had to be under strict control in restricted areas. Moreover, the Police Department also used other methods to prevent the Vietnamese from moving out of their restricted areas and contacting suspected outsiders.

In addition, from 1950 to 1951 and later, the Thai government banned aliens, mainly Viet Kieu, from occupations such as farmers, barbers, and tailors, among others. In many places, not only were Viet Kieu's travels strictly controlled, but they were even prohibited from doing business in the markets with Thai people. Therefore, Viet Kieu's business was more and more difficult (Hoang Van Hoan et al, 1978: 49). Each province and district had a Viet Kieu surveillance committee manned by the police. The

first thing that the Viet Kieu surveillance committee did was to issue everyone above 12 years old with personal papers. Everyone had to go to the police station to declare his or her full name, parents, and native village, and then had his or her picture taken and fingerprint recorded. In order for authorities to know the number of migrants and families, each family had a paper recording all its inhabitants. Under this strict control, if Viet Kieu would like to go out of their province, they had to go to the police station to ask for permission. If they were captured when going out of the province illegally, they would be punished by paying a 50-baht fine (Nguyen Thanh Van et al, 2001: 78).²¹ In order to control Viet Kieu easily, Luong Hom, the leader of the Viet Kieu surveillance committee often opened Vietnamese classes for Viet Kieu surveillance leaders in different districts and provinces. Given this coercive policy, the surveillance leaders had to intensify their search for patriotic movements of Viet Kieu day and night thoroughly. Some youths learned a trade in another province, and the surveillance leaders would go to their houses to threaten their parents to give them money. Moreover, they also cooperated with degenerated Viet Kieu who served to spy on all the patriotic activities and capture the cadres (Tran Dinh Luu, 2009: 37). Tran Dinh Luu (2009: 50) also

²¹ According to Tran Dinh Luu (2009: 37), Viet Kieu who went out of their residence without permission would be punished by paying a 500-baht fine for the first time and had to present themselves once a month for six consecutive months. For the second time, they would be put in Lat Bua Khao Prison forever.

stressed that in addition to these measures, the Thai government ordered the police to destroy Viet Kieu's national altars. When Viet Kieu asked permission to go out of their residence or celebrate a wedding ceremony, the local authorities asked them to destroy their national altars. The police's aims were to reduce the patriotic love of the Vietnamese by making them feel disappointed due to the difficult situations they had to face everyday. Then, they would follow the regime in southern Vietnam and receive more privileged conditions offered by both Thai police and the southern regime.

According to Kobkua (1995: 289), in 1953-1954, Bangkok decided to relocate the Vietnamese refugees from the northeast where they could be of great political and economic use to the Viet Minh to other parts of the Kingdom, which were of less strategic importance and where they would pose no threat to Thailand's security and political stability. In 1953, the Thai government was afraid of the Viet Minh forces that entered Lao territories and reached the Mekong River where it forms a natural border between Thailand and Laos. Thus, more serious policies were applied to control the Vietnamese in the northeast of Thailand, which the Thai government considered vulnerable to communist threats. As Nguyen Thanh Van et al (2001: 85) has pointed out, on May 21, 1953, the local authorities in the provincial town of Nong Khai mobilized the police and other forces including volunteer militia in groups of 3 to 4 people and placed them in front of every house of Viet Kieu. When the host opened the

door, they entered the house and took the male members of the family to the police station. In a short time, they arrested about 500 people because the action was so sudden and Viet Kieu did not have time to evade this situation. They took those people to Udon Thani and put them in temporary detention at Wat Vat Pho (a Buddhist temple). The police also arrested nearly 100 people in Tha Bo. These people had been summoned to the district police station on the pretext of changing their personal papers. When they went there, the police placed them together in a big room. In other district towns such as Si Chiang Mai, Phon Phi Sai, Bung Kan actions similar to that in Tha Bo were also taken. The total number of Viet Kieu who were arrested in Nong Khai amounted to over 900. They were transported to Phattalung province in southern Thailand by train at night.

In June, Phibunsongkhram launched a new campaign to “abduct” Viet Kieu in Sakhon Nakhon and other provinces and sent them to Surat Thani. The Viet Kieu salvation association thus improvised ways and means of avoiding the government’s plot. The slogan of female Viet Kieu was to “struggle to keep husbands and children.” If some men were arrested, women would cry and pull them away so that they could escape. When some men were put on a car, women would surround the car or lie down full length in front of it. The phrase “lying down full length to stop cars” arose from such an incident. Some soldiers were very cruel. They pulled and beat women very cruelly (Nguyen Thanh Van et al, 2001: 92). Only some months after the arrest of Viet Kieu

to send them to Surat Thani, the Thai government ordered their transportation to Ta Ru Tau Island in the south of Thailand. The Thai public and Thai press both protested this policy because at that time the south of Thailand already had problems of racial conflict (Nguyen Thanh Van et al, 2001: 96). As a result, the government terminated this measure.

The policy of moving Viet Kieu out of the border towns in 1952-1953 to dilute the solidarity of the Vietnamese community stemmed from the concerns of both the Thai government and the French about the support of Viet Kieu for the war of liberation in Vietnam. Apart from certain southern provinces, the Thai government also intended to move Viet Kieu to the mountainous area of Phetchabun. Viet Kieu protested because it was difficult to make a living in that mountainous area. Then, the Thai government decided to move Viet Kieu to Kalasin, still a poor province in the northeast with large arid areas and droughts all year round without any water for farming. Viet Kieu continued to write petitions to the King, the government, news agencies, and international organizations in Bangkok. The women also brought their utensils and their babies to the officials' houses or their friends' houses to sell, mainly to gain support and sympathy from Thai people (Nguyen Thanh Van et al, 2001: 97).

In addition, in the middle of 1954, the Thai government also banned education conducted in Vietnamese. Hence, in order to avoid violating Thai law, teaching was undertaken in secret and changed into "home-based study" with less than seven

students per class. The Thai police also observed all educational activities and the teachers who were arrested were either put in prison permanently or repatriated to Vietnam (Vu Manh Hung et al, 1976: 47). Thus, the classes were conducted in Viet Kieu's houses with precautionary measures such as placing guards in the neighborhood.

Eventually, to reduce the patriotic struggle of Viet Kieu, the Thai government decided to carry out the plan to "cut the snakes' heads" by hunting down the cadres. They hunted down around the clock from Nong Khai to Ubon Ratchathani. Every province had cruel guys in Viet Kieu surveillance committees and knew well about Viet Kieu's life (Nguyen Thanh Van et al, 2001: 97). From the end of 1953 to the beginning of 1954, they arrested nearly 100 cadres in Sakon Nakhon and Nakhon Phanom. They also sent some of the cadres to a prison in Bangkok, where by that time nearly 100 cadres were jailed (Nguyen Thanh Van et al, 2001:98).

At the end of 1954, pressured by the Americans, the Phibunsongkhram government prohibited Viet Kieu from hanging the red flag with yellow star and the photo of Ho Chi Minh and also forced Viet Kieu back to southern Vietnam. The government argued that Viet Kieu had come to Thailand to avoid war. Now that the war was over, so the Thai government decided to let Viet Kieu go back to their country. Moreover, the Thai government had diplomatic relations with the southern regime; it therefore negotiated with the

latter on repatriation of Viet Kieu to southern Vietnam (Nguyen Thanh Van et al, 2001:101).

In order to show their protests against the government's decision, some families even dug graves, prepared coffins and knives in front of their houses and declared that, if the government forced them to go to the south, they would die in Thailand (Nguyen Thanh Van et al, 2001: 105). One form of struggle that made a strong impression among Thai people and local authorities was for women to wear black clothes and shave their heads when they went to markets or shops. After some weeks, all Viet Kieu women in all the provinces in the northeast wore black clothes and shaved their heads to show their protests not to go to the south and live under the Ngo Dinh Diem regime, which formally came into being as the Republic of Vietnam (or commonly known as South Vietnam) in October 1955 (Nguyen Thanh Van et al, 2001: 105).

The years leading to the Geneva Accord in July 1954 were the darkest times for the Vietnamese in Thailand. They suffered from numerous unspeakable hardships caused by the Thai government policies to cut down their already few rights. Phibunsongkhram's suggestion was to repatriate all the Vietnamese back to their country. However, with two different regimes in Vietnam, 90 percent of the Vietnamese supported the DRV; even the Catholics did so, which surprised the Thai government. Another policy choice that was already mentioned, and which was also carried out in 1953, was to resettle the Vietnamese in southern Thailand,

such as in Phatthalung and Surat Thani. But this plan also proved unsuccessful as a result of the Vietnamese opposition and a lack of funds for carrying out the measure (Goscha, 1999: 325).

To summarize, all the strict policies of the Thai government depended on the anti-communist policy of the United States; that is, as a consequence of the Cold War in Southeast Asia. The situation worsened with the US intervention in Indochina following the French exit (Thanyathip Sripana and Trinh Dieu Thin, 2006: 165).

5.2.3 People to People Relationship in P. Phibunsongkhram Period

Ho Chi Minh taught during his stay in Siam from 1928 to 1929 that Viet Kieu must have good relations with the Thai people; and his teachings were carried out as a political way among Viet Kieu. The teaching also became a motto: “Viet-Thai Friendship” for all Viet Kieu to carry out in their daily lives. The Viet Kieu association judged that friendships with Thai people would be good for supporting the war effort in Vietnam as well as for protection of all activities of Viet Kieu against the pressures and suppression from reactionaries (Hoang Van Hoan et al, 1978: 33).

This kind of people-to-people diplomacy to create friendly relations between the Vietnamese and Thais had been used popularly and creatively since 1948 by the party committee with a specific motto: from personal relations to building peoples’

sentiments, and from daily personal relations to political sympathy (Hoang Van Hoan et al, 1978: 50). In addition, all levels had Viet-Thai friendship committees that included many sub-committees: the sub-committees specializing in specific activities and functions, such as creating sworn brotherhood; making friends with Thai people; mobilizing monks; mobilizing local authorities, scholars and soldiers; attending festivals; celebrating national holidays; and engaging in charity and public welfare (Hoang Van Hoan et al, 1978: 51).

Thus, the mission of Viet-Thai friendship became an exciting movement among Viet Kieu. Elderly people, youths, men, and women all devoted their ability to this mission, which was considered a patriotic activity. Every Viet Kieu, depending on his or her age and daily relations, tried to make friends with one or more Thais. According to the traditions in the northeast, as has been pointed out earlier, when people were bonded by sworn brotherhood, they would choose a day and invite the monks to bear witness to this relationship. They would tie a thread around their wrists, and from then on they became “xieu” or siblings by birth, and shared all sorrows and happiness, and considered their xieu’s family as theirs (Hoang Van Hoan et al, 1978: 51). Talking about the relations between the Thais and the Vietnamese, some Thai people in Udon Thani recall:

Case Study 8

Sorat Pitchomchum, 63 years old, an associate professor of Rajabhat University

Udonthani, recalls that under Phibun Songkhram's leadership, the Thai government propagandized through radios that Viet Kieu were spies and threats to Thai national security. At that time, telecommunication had not yet developed. As a consequence, Thai people were strongly influenced by this propaganda because they did not have other sources of information against which they could check the propaganda. Moreover, the Thai government was influenced by the American domino theory about the spread of communist threats. Although the Thai government tried to make serious divisions between Viet Kieu and Thais, Thai people still sympathized with and helped Viet Kieu to avoid suppression by the Thai government. Viet Kieu always wanted to make good relations with the Thais; therefore, they could overcome a lot of difficulties under the serious policies of controlling Viet Kieu.

Also explaining the reasons for the suppression of Thai government, another Thai expressed his ideas:

Case Study 9

Mr Thongsook Khamganya, 61 years old, is a director of a high school in Udon Thani. When Phibun Songkhram came to power, Viet Kieu started to have hard lives. Thai people who went to study in the US came back with anti-communist ideas. At that time, Thai people were afraid of communism because of the propaganda from the Voice of America, but at the people-to-people level, the Thais

still had good feelings towards Viet Kieu and helped the latter in their daily lives and also in avoiding the suppression from Thai government.

Apart from local people, Viet Kieu tried to make friends with local authorities in order to lessen the effectiveness of the government's policies. In cases of district and provincial leaders, Viet Kieu tried to get in touch with their families members, and then gradually contacted those leaders thanks to the introduction of these people. Sometimes, their wives and children understood that Viet Kieu were nice and asked their husbands not to do any harmful things to Viet Kieu (Hoang Van Hoan et al, 1978: 51).

Forging relations with the monks had a very strong effect. Wat, or Buddhist temples, had a strong spiritual power on Thai people. Monks were especially respected by Thai people. Sometimes, protection provided by the monks was more effective than the government rules and regulations. Hence, in order to mobilize the monks, Viet Kieu usually participated in many festivals at the temples with their political awareness of respecting Thai traditions. On May, 19 (Ho Chi Minh's Birthday), September, 2 (Independence Day), and on the New Year day, Viet Kieu asked the temples to organize festivals and asked them to invite Thai people to participate in such festivals. Thanks to festivals at the temples, Viet Kieu had friendly talks with Thai people, explaining to them the meanings of these festivals and telling them about the love and gratitude to them for their help and protection. One provincial governor talked to reporters many times:

“Viet Kieu were industrious; they liked peace and were judicious. I didn’t consider them as redundant people but as Thai people’s close friends” (Cited in Hoang Van Hoan et al, 1978: 51). Another provincial governor said in his office-assumption ceremony, which was also attended by Viet Kieu: “To love the country is the duty of everybody, every race. Viet Kieu’s love of their country is not criminal” (cited in Hoang Van Hoan et al, 1978: 52).

The Thai sentiment toward Viet Kieu grew more and more positive. Due to their personal sympathy, they helped the Vietnamese very actively. Sometimes, soldiers, police and local authorities told the Vietnamese of the government’s orders to arrest them. Sometimes, when they were forced to carry out a wrong command, they just did so perfunctorily. Sometimes, when their leaders used propaganda against Viet Kieu, some even dared to protest. Many officials and monks came to Viet Kieu’s houses to help write petitions. Some Thai people also protected Viet Kieu cadres in their houses to avoid suppression (Hoang Van Hoan et al, 1978: 53).

Viet-Thai friendship activities always reminded Viet Kieu of the need to respect the customs and traditions of the Thai people. They might do this out of personal liking for certain Thais or out of genuine admiration for Thai culture, but in general they behaved well toward Thai friends and neighbors (Nguyen Thanh Van et al, 2001: 79). At festivals, Viet Kieu were asked by their leaders to offer their friends, partners and neighbors cakes and other presents to cultivate good relations with them.

Thanks to this, the relations between Viet Kieu and Thais were more and more cordial and Viet-Thai activities became an exciting movement. The ceremony for making friends or sworn brotherhood was organized formally following the custom of the Thai people. In every province one member was assigned responsibility for Viet-Thai friendship activities in order to help the Viet Kieu's General Association to form suitable policies and contact the officials responsible for the lives of Viet Kieu, such as provincial and district authorities and the police. If relations with these people were good, they would be more lenient in carrying out the unfair policies of the central government (Nguyen Thanh Van et al, 2001: 80).

Thanks to such activities, in daily life as well as in their difficult struggle, Viet Kieu always received help and sympathy from Thai people in facing impacts of the policies of the government. Many Thai families provided residences for Viet Kieu. Many police and village leaders told Viet Kieu to escape when they had to carry out the raids. There was a good example of cordial relations between the Thais and the Vietnamese. When Viet Kieu were in a difficult situation because they had to move to the five provinces in the northeast following the new policy of the government, certain Thai newspapers sent Viet Kieu money raised by sympathetic Thai people. For instance, "Siam Nikon" newspaper on October 30, 1950, carried the following piece of news: "...the government forces the Vietnamese to move to the border, and many Thai people

sympathize with their difficulties. Therefore they sent some money to *Siam Nikon* in order to help the Vietnamese as follows: a group of workers 106 baht, a group of Patunam workers 210 baht, a group of students 225 baht, a medical group 185 baht” (Cited in Vu Manh Hung et al, 1976: 63).

The help from “xieu” Thai, officials, and soldiers was always remembered in the mind of Viet Kieu and they always tried to respond to their help by adhering to the teaching of Ho Chi Minh: “To live sincerely so that when you stay, people love you, when you leave, they miss you” (Nguyen Thanh Van et al, 2001: 80). A former Viet Kieu interviewed by the researcher has provided a good example of such a sentiment:

Case Study 10

According to Hoang Ngoc Diep, 78 years old, from Nakhon Phanom, Viet Kieu used many good ways to reduce the impacts of strict policies. One of the most remarkable ways was the use of Viet-Thai friendship. On special occasions, Viet Kieu always invited Thai friends to join them in the celebration of certain events and gave them presents such as special cake, foodstuff, etc. They also forged “xieu” or swear brotherhood. Brothers of such ties could share everything even their lives. In addition, they also had good business relations with the Thais. They always shared sorrows and happiness together. Therefore, whenever the Thai government applied unsuitable policies to Viet Kieu, Thai people showed their support by helping Viet Kieu write petitions to the authorities

or avoid the raids from the Thai police. The Thai people were generally unsatisfied with the policies of their government. Sympathy of the Thai public significantly contributed to the struggle of Viet Kieu.

According to Tran Dinh Luu (2009: 45), Viet Kieu carried out the policy of Viet-Thai friendship. So from personal ties such as “xieu” brotherhood and sentiments a national sentiment developed. In the harvest time, Viet Kieu worked in the field with xieu Thai; many Viet Kieu planted coconut trees in xieu Thai’s garden. On Vietnamese Independence Day, xieu Thai brought rice, banana leaves, coconuts, chickens, and ducks to Viet Kieu and they had meals together happily. In many places, when Viet Kieu were suppressed, they went to hide in xieu Thai’s houses or xieu Thai went to share sorrows with Viet Kieu whose family members were arrested by the Thai police. Thais had good feelings for Viet Kieu because they had honest life, affection and gratitude. The researcher’s interview with a Viet Kieu in Nakhon Phanom illustrated this situation:

Case Study 11

According to Dang Bang, 79 years old, from Nakhon Phanom, under the leadership of Phibun Songkhram, despite the Thai government’s propaganda about Viet Kieu, the relations between the Thais and Viet Kieu were still on good terms. Viet Kieu used their lifestyle to prove that they were honest, law abiding and hard working people. They had good relations with the locals and received sympathy from the majority of the Thais who still

did business with Viet Kieu. Although they were in hard conditions, they still overcame all the difficulties thanks to the help of their Thai friends and neighbors.

However, the relations between the Thais and the Vietnamese had both positive and negative sides. While receiving support from most Thais, Viet Kieu also suffered from the prejudices of certain other Thais during the Phibunsongkhram period. In reality, the Thais during this period were under direct influence from both the Thai government and the US, and they did not have any other sources against which to check the information they received. As a result, many Thai people believed in the propaganda and considered Viet Kieu as threats to Thai national security and protested against them. They followed the Thai government's propaganda by isolating Viet Kieu both spiritually and economically. For instance, they kept distance from Viet Kieu and refused to have any business links with Viet Kieu. They isolated the Viet Kieu shops and did not stop by to buy or to sell goods to Viet Kieu. As a result, Viet Kieu businesses in this period suffered badly.

It can be said that the Phibunsongkhram period was the start of the prejudices against Viet Kieu in Thailand in general and in the northeast in particular in several decades later. The prejudices were expressed at both the authority and the local levels. At the authority level, Viet Kieu were banned from conducting business with Thais and the Thais were beaten if they bought goods from Viet Kieu. Moreover, the Thai police also destroyed the

Vietnamese national altars and propagated bad information about Viet Kieu. The authorities also prohibited Viet Kieu from assuming jobs in order to cause troubles economically. Furthermore, the authorities also kept blind eyes towards the bad actions from certain Thais. For instance, some Thais smashed Viet Kieu's houses or invited Viet Kieu to go out to the remote areas and killed them. In addition, Viet Kieu also suffered a lot from the surveillance committee. The leader of the surveillance committee was Luong Hom, as Viet Kieu usually called him. He could speak Vietnamese and had a Vietnamese wife. He opened Vietnamese classes for surveillance committee members and behaved cruelly to Viet Kieu. There appeared in every corner of the Vietnamese community guys from the surveillance committee to spy on and report about Viet Kieu activities. For instance, if a Viet Kieu fled to another province to seek jobs, those guys from the surveillance committee would threaten his family in order to get money. At the level of the Thais, many Thai people tried to isolate Viet Kieu by creating bad rumors about them. For example, they said that if someone ate Viet Kieu food, they would be poisoned and their sexual organs would shrink. This would make people afraid of the food and Viet Kieu could not do business in the food sector. It also made Viet Kieu's lives increasingly difficult. However, the prejudices in this period were not very strong in comparison with those in the later periods.

It was during these most difficult years that the people-to-people relations were tested and

consolidated. The friendliness was proved by history as an unshakeable current. This was the foundation for the maintenance and development of relations between Vietnam and Thailand not only in this period but also in later times (Hoang Khac Nam, 2007: 49). The friendly relations between Thais and Vietnamese were once proved despite changes in Thai politics. Minister of Foreign Affairs Phot Sarasin resigned to show his protest against the Thai government's recognition of the Bao Dai regime. Many classes of people, monks, and Thai officials protested the harsh policies towards Viet Kieu. They undertook many activities to help Viet Kieu, such as writing articles to condemn the Thai government, protecting arrested people, praying at Buddhist temples, and so on. The suppression of and propaganda against Viet Kieu by the Phibunsongkhram government did not affect the long-standing friendship between the Thais and the Vietnamese (Hoang Khac Nam, 2007: 56).

5.3 Conclusion

It cannot be denied that Pridi Banomyong and Phibunsongkhram played crucial roles in Thai political history and shared the glory as Thai prime ministers. The years 1939-1942 were Phibunsongkhram's greatest time, while the period from July 1944 to November 1947 was Pridi Banomyong's greatest political triumph (Kobkua, 1996: 166). Although Phibunsongkhram was criticized for his shortcomings, he was a great

contributor to Thai national security as well as economic development. Thanks to his political policies, Thailand received much aid, such as military equipment and financial assistance from the United States for the development and modernization, as well as security protection, of Thailand in the most turbulent periods of Thai and world history. On the other hand, Pridi Banomyong promoted the mental development of the Thai people, especially the educated younger generations, who considered him a champion of democracy, liberalism and social justice. Moreover, he was a Thai hero after World War II because he led Thailand away from the consequences of the war as a country on the losing side by cooperating with the Allies. In brief, Thailand was lucky to have the service of these two men in the time of need.

We can see the contrast in Thai foreign and domestic policies during different periods in Thai history from Field Marshal P. Phibunsongkhram to Pridi Banomyong. The two leaders also differed in their views on communist movements in Southeast Asia. Their respective viewpoints were expressed clearly in the two different periods of the two leaders. During the Pridi Banomyong period (1946-1947), he showed his sympathy towards the patriotic movements of the Indochinese countries by providing those countries with bases for soldier training and procurement of weapons and other necessities. In contrast, Phibunsongkhram resisted the liberation movements in the Indochinese countries by aligning his country with France and the

United States. Furthermore, Phibun Songkhram also showed his strong opposition to the DRV and China by recognizing the puppet Bao Dai regime in the south of Vietnam, closing the representative and information offices of the DRV in Bangkok, and suppressing the Vietnamese and Chinese communities in Thailand. During the First Indochina War, the Phibun Songkhram government caused a lot of hardships for these two communities with hopes to stem the spread of communism to Thailand. Thailand was active in following the US anti-communist policy; it joined SEATO as a tool to defend their country and put the Indochinese countries under its umbrella. In addition, Thailand allowed the United States to use Thai territory for military bases for further attacks on Vietnam and issued the anti-communist act in 1952 to outlaw those related to communism especially the Vietnamese community in the northeast. All these activities proved that Thailand completely moved to the western camp with anti-communist policy under the United States protection.

The relations between the Vietnamese and the Thais were good during the Pridi Banomyong period from 1946 to 1947. Without the help of the Thai government and Thai people, the Vietnamese would not have been able to overcome the initial problems they faced when they came to Thailand from Laos. The Thais and Vietnamese lived in harmony under the patronage of the Thai government. However, the fate of the Vietnamese changed for the worse under the government of Phibun Songkhram. The Thai government controlled the Vietnamese community

seriously in order to stop them from supporting the revolutionary cause in Vietnam and Laos against the French. Therefore, the Vietnamese community in Thailand in general and in the northeast in particular had to face many unfair policies imposed by the government. However, through the difficult situation, the relations between the Thais and the Vietnamese were tested and became more cordial. Even though the Thais were still suspicious about communism through Thai and American propaganda, they still loved and supported the Vietnamese. Thanks to help from the Thais, the Vietnamese overcame the difficulties in supporting the war efforts in Vietnam.

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that Thai foreign and domestic policies changed dramatically from time to time following the changes in regional and world situations. These changes strongly affected the political situations in Southeast Asia and had strong impacts on the Vietnamese community in Thailand. Therefore, this chapter, which has focused on the political situations in Thailand during the First Indochina War from Pridi Banomyong period (1946-1947) to Phibunsongkhram period, (1948-1954) and the impacts of these changes on the Vietnamese in Thailand as well as the relationship between the Vietnamese and the Thais, serves as a basis for further understanding about Thai political situations during the First Indochina War (1946 to 1954) and their impacts on Viet Kieu in Thailand as well as Thai-Vietnamese relations on both state-to-state and people-to-people levels.

6**CONCLUSION**

The Vietnamese community in Thailand has a long history, dating back to the 17th century. In spite of the ups and downs of this history, they still lived in harmony with the Siamese and enjoyed good relationships with them. Therefore, they played an important part in the development and prosperity of the Siamese kingdom. Right after WW II, due to the return of the French in Indochina, thousands of Vietnamese fled to Thailand, following the suppression by the French in Laos, and established a strong community in the northeast of Thailand that formed the basis for the patriotic movements to support the war effort in Vietnam.

During the First Indochina War, the Vietnamese community in the northeast of Thailand operated a supply network to support the liberation movements in Vietnam. Moreover, the patriotic movements of the Vietnamese in Thailand in general and in the northeast in particular initially benefited from the support of both Thai citizens and the Thai government. With the changes of government from a civilian to military one, the Vietnamese community had to suffer from many hardships. However, the relations between the Thais and the Vietnamese were still on good terms. The friendship between the two peoples stemmed mainly from the “Viet-Thai

friendship” activities of the Vietnamese community and also originated from the relations between the two peoples through history. The history recorded the roles of Ho Chi Minh in promoting the friendship between the Thai people and the Vietnamese during the time he stayed in Siam. Thus, he established the base for the mutual friendship between the two peoples that has lasted for decades.

The contributions of the Vietnamese patriotic movements were essential to the DRV’s fight against the French. During the First Indochina War, the Vietnamese community in the northeast of Thailand spared no efforts to do their best for the revolutionary cause in their fatherland. They mobilized human as well as material resources to support the resistance war in Vietnam. As a consequence, they established four strong battalions to send to the south of Vietnam to fight the French. Even though the standards of living of Viet Kieu in the northeast of Thailand was still low, many families not only sent their children to the base for military training but also bought rifles and military uniforms for their children. In addition to providing human forces, the Vietnamese also created a supply network for the arms purchase and transport in Thailand. They used Thailand as a base for the DRV’s representatives especially Tran Van Giau to procure arms to send to the south of Vietnam. Thanks to the arms procured in Thailand, the DRV could form well-equipped battalions to fight the French. Besides, they launched many movements to collect money from the Vietnamese to send back to Vietnam. Examples of the most

noticeable movements included the “rice saving jar” and “buying the DRV’s war bonds”. Hence, they received a lot of money especially on special occasions such as New Year day, Independent Day, and Ho Chi Minh’s birthday. Those activities proved that the Vietnamese community in Thailand was very patriotic and faithful to the DRV, even in the turbulent periods.

However, the study finds that the efforts of the Vietnamese community in contributing to the DRV’s resistance war would have been far more difficult without the support from both the local people and the Thai government, especially during the Pridi Banomyong period. It is easy to recognize that during this period, the patriotic movements of the Vietnamese were in favorable conditions. The Vietnamese received sympathy and full support from the Thai government, especially the Seri Thai leaders. The Pridi Banomyong government even allowed the Vietnamese to establish bases for military training and also lent the weapons for military practice. In addition, Pridi Banomyong also provided a large amount of weapons to the DRV so Ho Chi Minh named the battalions equipped with these weapons Battalion Siam 1 and Siam 2. Moreover, partly due to the government’s sympathy to the Vietnamese, the Thais showed their generosity and kindness to these people in their daily lives and turned a blind eye to the nationalist activities of the Vietnamese in Thailand.

This period thus witnessed cordial relations between the two peoples. With the motto “to live

sincerely so that when you stay, people love you, when you leave, they miss you,” the Vietnamese lived in harmony with the local people. They made good impressions on the Thais and received from the latter sympathy for their political activities. This period could be regarded as the golden period of relations between the Thais and the Vietnamese. As a result, the patriotic movements of the Vietnamese in this period were overt and exciting. Thailand became a gate for the DRV to disseminate its propaganda of the resistance war to the outside world.

In contrast, the Phibunsongkhram government was closely allied with the US and followed its policy to counter the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. Thailand followed the US containment doctrine in order to gain benefits from the US economic and military aid. Thus, Thailand became a front line state in containing communism in this region. Moreover, the anti-communist policies stemmed from concerns about the victory of communists in China and its impact on the Indochinese countries in terms of its support for the liberation movements in those countries. Therefore, in order to prevent the spread of communism, the Thai government imposed strict control over the Vietnamese community in the northeast. By doing this, the Thai government hoped it could reduce the support of the Vietnamese in Thailand for the DRV and prevent any links to communism. Other harsh measures were also taken, such as moving the Vietnamese to the southern provinces in order to isolate them from their

community and thereby reduce their patriotic strength. In particular, a new “anti-communist law” was issued in 1952 to outlaw the so-called Vietnamese communists. In spite of the bad propaganda about communism and the Vietnamese community as a “fifth column” of the communist force, relations between the Thais and the Vietnamese remained generally good.

However, certain Thai civil servants and officials were influenced by the propaganda from both the Thai government and the US; they showed their strong opposition to the Vietnamese community. As a consequence, Viet Kieu in this period suffered spiritually as well as materially from the Thais in the northeast of Thailand. Therefore, the relations between the Thais and the Vietnamese were less cordial in comparison with those in the Pridi Banomyong period. However, it was in such difficult situations that the relations between the Vietnamese and the Thais were tested. In spite of the pressure from the government, Thai people still helped their Vietnamese neighbors with deep sympathy. For instance, when Thai police suppressed the Vietnamese, Thai people, especially xieu Thai, helped the Vietnamese to escape or hid the Vietnamese as well as their property in their houses. Even some Thai officials showed their protests to their leaders against the false propaganda about the Vietnamese. Hence, it can be said that nothing could destroy the good relations between the two peoples.

The relations between the Thais and the Vietnamese during the first Indochina war underwent

many challenges. In certain periods of time, the Thai government also banned its citizens to have close relations with the Vietnamese both in business and in daily life. But the Thais were not afraid and did not follow that kind of plot to divide the two peoples. Thanks to support from the local people and authorities, the impacts of the policies of the Thai government during that period were significantly reduced. For example, Viet Kieu were occasionally protected from the raids of the Thai police by the support of the local people.

The reasons for the love and protection given by the Thais to the Vietnamese could be traced back to the past decades in the presence of Ho Chi Minh in Siam in the late 1920s. In fact, Ho Chi Minh was very active in promoting good relations between the two peoples by educating the Vietnamese in the northeast of Thailand to respect Thai laws, customs and traditions. Thanks to his advice, the Vietnamese changed their lifestyles and became nicer in the eyes of the Siamese in that period. As a result, they were integrated completely into Siamese society and became parts of it. Thus, with their new lifestyles, the Vietnamese won the hearts of the Siamese and this made their relations more cordial. More importantly, Ho Chi Minh himself also set good examples for the Vietnamese to follow. He lived and worked like other people and integrated himself into Siamese society by studying Thai, customs, culture and traditions of the locals and made good relations with them to win their hearts. Therefore, with his lifestyle, he was loved and supported by both the

locals and Thai authorities. For instance, when he was raided by the Thai police, due to a request from the French, he was protected by the locals, Thai authorities and even the Thai monks. The cordial relations between the two peoples during the time Ho Chi Minh stayed in Siam had a crucial impact on the relations between Thai and Vietnamese several decades later.

In conclusion, in an effort to explain the roles of the Vietnamese in Thailand in the supply networks of the DRV during the First Indochina War (1946-1954) and how the support of the Thais to the patriotic activities of the Vietnamese shaped the relations between the two peoples during this period, this study provides basic knowledge about the relations between the Thais and the Vietnamese for further study on this and other related topics. However, through this study, it is evident that Vietnamese-Thai relations have had a relatively strong foundation. It was mainly external influences that sometimes have affected this relationship, such as the US intervention in Southeast Asia for the purpose of containing communism in this region.

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APPENDIX

LIST OF INFORMANTS

No.	Name	Interview Date	Remark
Scholars			
1	Assoc. Prof. Sorat Pitchomchum	7 December 2009	Rachabath University, Udon Thani
2	Suprida Banomyong	17 December 2009	Son of Pridi Banomyong
3	Dr. Thanyathip Sripana	7 July 2009	Chulalongkorn University
4	Assoc. Prof. Withaya Sucharithanarugse	1 December 2009	Chulalongkorn University
5	Trinh Dieu Thin	9 March 2010	Researcher, Hanoi
6	Ass. Prof. Dr. Nguyen Duy Dung	9 March 2010	Vietnam academy of social sciences, Hanoi
7	Dr. Hoang Khac Nam	8 March 2010	University for social sciences and humanities, Hanoi

Officials			
8	Vietnamese Embassy's Official	5 December 2009	Vietnamese Embassy, Bangkok
Viet Kieu			
9	Hoang Ngoc Diep	6 November 2009	Male, 78, Nakhon Phanom
10	Nguyen Xuan Khien	6 November 2009	Male, 82, Nakhon Phanom
11	Dong Van Son	7 November 2009	Male, 84, Nakhon Phanom
12	Dang Bang	7 November 2009	Male, 79, Nakhon Phanom
13	Dao Trong Ly	8 November 2009	Male, 59, Nakhon Phanom
14	Hoang Van Phuc	8 November 2009	Male, 74, Nakhon Phanom
15	Pham Duc Minh	14 November 2009	Male, 87, Udon Thani
16	Kieu Thi Thao	14 November 2009	Female, 75, Udon Thani
17	Nguyen Xuan Oanh	15 November 2009	Female, 62, Udon Thani
18	Le Van Yen	15 November 2009	Male, 73, Udon Thani

19	Vu Duy Chinh	16 November 2009	Male, 67, Udon Thani
20	Tran Ngoc Dinh	16 November 2009	Male, 87, Udon Thani
21	Vu Manh Hung	16 November 2009	Male, 63, Udon Thani
22	Nguyen Thanh Van	8 December 2009	Male, 83, Udon Thani
23	Chau Kim Quoi	10 July 2009, 04 November 2009	Bangkok
Thais			
24	Lec so kham	7 December 2009	Female, 61, Udon Thani
25	Wuthichai Boonbutta	7 December 2009	Male, 62, Udon Thani
26	Thongsook Khamganya	7 December 2009	Male, 61, Udon Thani
27	Suphap Bundon	8 December 2009	Male, 85, Udon Thani