The Vietnamese Refugees in Thailand: Minority Manipulation in Counterinsurgency

by E. Thadeus Flood

Introduction

The purpose of this brief survey is to clarify the political role of the Vietnamese minority in recent Thai history. The importance of this subject derives from the long-held but unexamined assumption on the part of the Thai ruling classes and, since World War II, U.S. academic ideologues of neo-colonialism, that social revolution is somehow extraneous to Thai history. If it does rear its ugly head—so the thinking goes—it must be the result of transborder subversion and not of factors indigenous to Thai social history. One villain in this piece of wishful thinking—and the principal one since the 1950s—has been the Vietnamese revolutionary movement. The immediate scapegoats have been those militant anti-imperialist Vietnamese who took temporary refuge in Thailand from the destructive effects of French and later American expansion into their homelands. They have long been viewed—and are still seen by the present regime in Bangkok—as virtual “saboteurs,” frontline agents of revolution that would otherwise be alien to “happy” Thailand.

It is hoped that this review of the history of the Vietnamese minority in Thailand will help to demolish the myth that the Thai peoples themselves are not capable of revolution, and will at the same time expose the way in which this minority has been and still is being manipulated by the Thai ruling classes, recently with the assistance of American-derived counterinsurgency programs. Removing the Vietnamese minority as the Thai state’s scapegoat for its own insoluble socio-economic and political troubles (and from American academia’s arsenal of anti-communist platitudes) will help to place the focus of the problem where it should always have been: on the Thai peoples themselves and on their own long struggle for dignity and social justice.

The survey that follows begins with a review of the Vietnamese minority in pre-imperialist Thailand (Part I). Changes in the composition and political outlook of the emigres during the French colonial period are discussed with special reference to their peculiar role in the formation of the Comintern’s Siam Communist Party in 1930 and after. The latter issue is analyzed directly from recent Thai Communist Party documents (Part II). The general problem of the Thai “attitude” towards the Vietnamese minority is then taken up on the basis of a distinction between the repressive Thai state and the Thai people (the masses). In this connection, the emergence of an anti-imperialist sentiment shared between Thai Northeasterners and Vietnamese emigres as a result of Japanese imperialist aggression (1940-45) in the Indochina countries and Thailand is also studied (Part III). The gradual postwar hardening of the myth of the refugees as a “vanguard” of imminent external aggression is documented, along with the increasing repression of the emigres by the Thai state, itself now a virtual pawn in wider American counterinsurgency programs. This analysis spans the French Indochina War era (Part IV) and the American Indochina War era (Part V). Finally, armed with this perspective, a brief attempt is made to assess the ever more precarious condition of the Vietnamese emigres (not including new arrivals from the end of the Saigon regime) at the hands of the post-October 6, 1976, military dictatorship and its violently anti-communist policies (Part VI).

What follows in no way purports to be an exhaustive treatment of this subject. Similarly, it is not intended to be an ethnographic study, nor a treatise on Thai-Vietnamese diplomatic relations.

I. The Pre-Imperialist Era

Thailand has been a refuge for Vietnamese fleeing social and political upheavals in their own land since the late eighteenth century. The earliest Vietnamese refugee community in Thailand (then known as Siam), as distinct from earlier traders, was that of the ruling family of the Nguyen, whose center of power at Hue was overrun by the greatest peasant uprising in pre-twentieth-century Vietnamese history: the Tay-son Rebellion (1771-1802). The first ruler of the present Bangkok dynasty of Chakri welcomed these highborn refugees from social revolution in Vietnam. He instinctively recognized that the “roaring armies” of the Tay-son peasants somehow represented a threat to kingship and royal prerogatives in neighboring countries as well. For reasons of both social-class preservation and political self-interest, therefore, he sent Thai conscript armies to help the Nguyen suppress the peasant rebels. The Nguyen successfully defeated this traditional uprising and established the Nguyen Dynasty (1802-1945) over a unified Vietnam. Remnants of these early refugees who remained in the area of the Thai capital were settled at Bangpho, which is within the present-day city of Bangkok (known as Krungthep in Thai).

A united Vietnamese dynasty under the Nguyen eventually brought antagonisms between this ruling house and the Thai ruling elite as both states sought to extend their traditional empires into Laos and Cambodian regions. The resulting conflicts were within the general pattern of endless wars between mainland Southeast Asian monarchies for the
labor power of peasant cultivators; who produced the surplus revenues that sustained them and, of course, who fought their wars for them. From the 1830s to the 1850s new groups of lower class Vietnamese refugees arrived in Thai territory, consisting mainly of prisoners of war taken by Thai armies fighting in Vietnam and Cambodia. Those who were Buddhists among these were usually sent to Chantabun in southeast Thailand, while the French-proselytized Catholic Vietnamese were usually placed under the supervision of Portuguese Catholic priests in the Samsen area (within present Bangkok). Later some of the Buddhist Vietnamese around Chantabun were permitted to move to Bangkok and its environs, where they eventually formed a minority of some five or six thousand persons living largely as fishermen along the Chao Phraya River tributaries near Bangpho.

In the second and third quarters of the nineteenth century the Vietnamese communities in the southeast were increased slightly with an influx of Catholic refugees from anti-Christian persecutions under: Emperors Minh Mang (r.1820-40), Thieu Tri (r.1841-47) and Tu Duc (r.1848-1883). These Catholics, coming by sea from the south, established themselves at Thai coastal points from Trat, Chantabun and Rayong in the far southeast to Samut Songkram, west of Bangkok on the Gulf of Thailand. Others moved up the Chao Phraya River to the Bangkok area, settling at Paknam and Paklat (i.e., Phrapradang) and even moving as far north as Paknampho and Nakhionsawan, 250 km north of the capital city. All of these were products of the pre-Western imperialist push into the region. They seem to have been generally commoners (i.e., not mandarins or literati) and possessed none of the political awareness or varieties of “nationalism” of later arrivals.3

II. Anti-French Colonial Struggle, 1890-1945

Around the late 1880s a new type of Vietnamese was coming into Thailand. These were refugees from the vicious French seizure of southern and central Vietnam. The refugees from the south settled originally near their predecessors, along the southeast Thai coast and up into the Bangkok areas near Phrapradang. In the 1890s, partisans of the Can Vuong (Protect the King) Movement and its leader, Phan Dinh Phung, arrived. Several hundred strong, these refugees from the desperate resistance against the French in central Vietnam settled in small communities on the Thai side of the Mekong River opposite Suwanakhet and Thakhek, across from what was now French-controlled Laos (after 1893). These tiny communities in northeast Thailand set the precedent for Thailand as a haven from the brutalities of foreign imperialism in Indochina. They included a significant number of old guerrilla fighters from central Vietnam where some of the most violent resistance to the French and some of the most brutal French suppression had taken place.6

It was these communities that first attracted the attention of the famous literati resistance fighter and early nationalist, Phan Boi Chau. Between 1908 and 1912 around 100 partisans of Phan’s Duc Tan Hoi (Reformation Society) arrived in Thailand. Their plan was to set up self-subsistent agricultural communities along the Tai-French Laos frontier that would serve as external bases for operations against the colonial regime. Under the leadership of one of Phan Boi Chau’s lieutenants, Dang Thuc Hua (Dang Ngo Sinh), these militants engaged in petty farming, artisanal work, and itinerant peddling in matches, cloth, medicines and the like to neighboring Thai villagers. In addition to bases on the Mekong River across from Laos, they had important communities at Phichit, Nakhionsawan, Lampang, Phitsanulok and other points in north-central Thailand.8

By their own testimony, these new arrivals were well received by the Thai peasant populations among whom they eked out their living in the provinces. Yet, unlike earlier 19th century emigres, these newer refugees in the northeast tended to view Thailand as a temporary haven in the long anti-French struggle, even though the efficiency of the French colonial police in fact greatly prolonged their stay in Thailand. They harbored memories and legends of the earlier resistance battles against the French, and they continued to lay plans for the eventual liberation of their homeland. The latter were, however, of the sporadic, “bomb-throwing” type, and lacked political sophistication. As a politico-trained Vietnamese in the mid-twenties noticed, the emigre communities in central and northeast Thailand lacked any comprehensive understanding of the historic problem of imperialism that they faced.9 Still, over the years, they remained committed patriots. In the early twenties the prospects for liberating Indochina from French control seemed to brighten with the emergence of a strong anti-imperialist movement across the border in southern China, assisted by the new socialist regime in Russia.

It was this new prospect that encouraged the old emigre leader in the northeast, Dang Thuc Hua, to send a number of young emigre militants to Canton in the early twenties. In late 1923 or early 1924, these joined with other militants from Vietnam to form the Tam Tam Xu (Society of Like Minds). This group sought assistance from the Soviets in Canton in their anti-French plans.10 The young members of the Tam Tam Xu, including some from Thailand, would form the original core of Ho Chi Minh’s (i.e., Nguyen Ai Quoc) first cadres when he arrived in Canton from France, via Russia, in December 1924. They were among the earliest members of Vietnam’s first internationalist anti-imperialist struggle group, formed by Ho Chi Minh in Canton in June 1925: the Hoi Vietnam Tinh Nen Caub Mang Dong Chi (Vietnam Young Revolutionary Comrades Society). This group was in turn the forerunner of the Indo-Chinese Communist Party and the Lao Dong (Workers) Party of today’s liberated Vietnam.11
These young cadres of Ho Chi Minh’s *Thabh Nien* group were given a “Special Political Training Course” in Canton which provided them for the first time with a comprehensive framework for understanding imperialism: the ideology of Marxism-Leninism. They were then sent back—most to Vietnam itself but some to northeast Thailand’s emigre communities—to organize workers and peasants associations.12 Ho Chi Minh’s concern for the revolutionary capacity of the Vietnamese (and for that matter the Chinese) peasantry dated at least from late 1923 and his association, as a delegate of the French Communist Party, with the Peasant International (*Krestitstern*) in Moscow.13 It is not generally recognized that this interest and theoretical concern predates that of most later Asian communist peasant leaders, with the exception of the early Chinese peasant leader with whom he was acquainted, Peng Bai (P’eng Pai).14 As early as 1925, therefore, when the first graduates of his “Special Political Training Course” returned to Thailand, they set about forming revolutionary peasant associations. At first, they found the situation among the emigres, who by this time numbered some 20,000 in the northeast, quite disappointing because, despite their nostalgic patriotism, their political consciousness was low and they lacked organization and durable planning. The *Thabh Nien* cadres thus set up subsections of their organization and began educational work among them. They did not concern themselves with the largely Catholic “old Vietnamese” settlers from the 19th century.

The peasant associations set up by the *Thabh Nien* cadres at Udorn Thani, Nakhon Phanom, Sakon Nakhon, Mukdahan and elsewhere in the Northeast were known as *Hoi Tban Ai* (Fraternal Associations); they were designed to bring the emigres together and to educate them in communal solidarity and sentiments of nationalism.

Other young militants fled across the Mekong River from French Laos after 1925 and set up so-called *Hoi Hop Tac* (Work Cooperative) among the emigre communities on the Thai bank. The members of the *Hoi Hop Tac* jointly worked to reclaim new land for farming (there was no population pressure at this time in the Northeast), shared their work tools in common and, except for minimal subsistence earnings, put their incomes back into the *Hoi Hop Tac* common fund. This in turn went to support revolutionary work in Indochina. The *Hoi Hop Tac* soon became the backbone of these revolutionary bases on the periphery of Indochina. They served as an important source of funds for revolutionary operations within the country.

The *Hoi Tban Ai* and the *Hoi Hop Tac* groups were already operating in Thailand when Ho Chi Minh arrived there around August of 1928.15 By this time these northeastern Thai emigre bases were virtually the only ones for operations against the French, after the collapse of the South China revolution in 1927 and the beginning of Jiang Jieshi’s (Chiang K’ai-shek) “White Terror,” and this no doubt accounts for Ho Chi Minh’s presence there. Because of the French Sûreté Coloniale was closely tracking him, Ho was obliged to adopt another of many pseudonyms he used, in this case the Thai-Lao term “Thao Chin,” meaning “Old Mr. Chin” (＝Chinese). Like his boyhood hero Phan Boi Chau before him, Ho got his first real taste of peasant conditions as he travelled on foot for the next year from one emigre community to another, living, working and sharing with the emigres their daily efforts to survive.

It is interesting to note that it was here in Thailand that Ho seems to have worked out for the first time the classic rural organizing techniques that would later carry his movement to power on a wave of revolutionary nationalism, and serve as a model for other Third World countries. Most notable among these efforts was his egalitarian respect for the lowest peasant or itinerant peddler. It should be noted here too that this respect extended also to his own country and its populace. He set a long-held precedent for the emigre communities in the northeast by insisting that his compatriots respect Thai Buddhism, observe Thai laws and customs. (There were no anti-communist laws in Thailand at this time.) He scolded the older emigres for not showing enough interest in studying the language and customs of their host country. He insisted that they do these things so that the Thai would sympathize with them and support their anti-colonial cause. He set the example by taking up the study of Thai himself. He insisted that the emigres apply for government permission to open up schools where both Vietnamese and Thai would be taught. In every community to which he trekked, he stressed literacy and education. In addition, he promoted the opening of medical facilities for the emigres.

Hand in hand with these methods went a subtle attack on such practices as gambling, drinking, and indulgence in old superstitions. In place of the latter, especially, he sought to inculcate political and social consciousness as well as national pride. For the literate among them, he urged reading of the *Thabh Nien* and other journals; for the illiterate, he and his cadres would stand in the village assemblies in the evenings and painstakingly read and explain the revolutionary press. In doing so, they infused a more sharply defined nationalist, anti-colonial sentiment and consciousness into the emigres. Ho Chi Minh himself grafted nationalist and political themes onto long-held village traditions of composing simple poems and songs with relevant, contemporary political themes. He composed new lines for old village tunes and added nationalist notes to peasant songs hummed in the fields or on the roads. He plunged into community theatre, introducing with his mimicry new political and social sentiments into old dialogues.16

To further clarify the role of these revolutionary Vietnamese centers in Thailand, it is necessary to follow the movements of Ho Chi Minh in this era more closely. He left the Thai northeast around mid-June 1929 and went to the Bangkok area, probably to organize old-time Vietnamese revolutionaries scattered about there.17 His efforts here related to the developing competition among the *Thabh Nien* and other Vietnamese revolutionary groups to form a single revolutionary party, both in response to objective conditions...
within Vietnam and to the Third (Communist) International, or Comintern, Sixth Congress (July-September 1928) call for the replacement of regional revolutionary centers with national parties or "sections." Naturally, whatever party succeeded in gaining Comintern recognition would immediately benefit from the prestige, organizational skills and funding of the International.

It was in this connection that Ho Chi Minh left Thailand in the autumn of 1929 and went to Kowloon in British Hong Kong. Here, on February 3, 1930, he chaired a Unification Congress which founded the Vietnam (soon renamed Indo-China) Communist Party. But, according to his old comrade in Thailand, Le Manh Trinh, Ho Chi Minh returned to the Thai Northeast "for a few days" in March 1930, bringing news of the new party and its platform to the Vietnamese revolutionaries. According to recent Thai Communist Party statements on their own history, however, we find the first indication that "in 1930, Comrade Ho Chi Minh, representative of the Third International, came to Thailand and set up the Siam Communist Party (Phak Khommuat Sayam) as a section of the Third International. This would be, in fact, quite in conformity with Ho Chi Minh's long connection with the Comintern and with the Sixth Congress' call for the establishment of national sections. But in regard to the Vietnamese role in Thailand, it is crucial to see that the establishment of such a party did not conform to objective conditions in Thailand. That is, in contrast to China and Vietnam, objective conditions among the Thai (as distinct from politically sophisticated Overseas Chinese and emigre Vietnamese in Thailand) neither required nor supported a proletarian (communist) party. As TCP spokesmen now note, historic conditions peculiar to Thailand kept political consciousness among the Thai very low. Translated into political realities, this simply meant that the Siam Communist Party was composed of non-Thai elements right down until its disintegration in 1939-40 (leading to its reorganization in December 1942 as the Thai Communist Party). Overwhelmingly Chinese and Vietnamese, these elements were only interested in liberation and revolution in their homelands. The history of the Siam Communist Party (SCP) and the role of the Vietnamese (and Chinese) in it illustrates the formalistic function of the Comintern in 20th century Asian history. It existed, formally, for a decade as the "Siam Section" of the Comintern and on Comintern paper, at least, it should have been promoting revolution in Thailand. Yet as admitted by the Thai Communist Party—successor to the SCP—the earlier party had virtually no Thai in it but was composed of Chinese and Vietnamese revolutionaries who were also members of their own revolutionary groups (Chinese Communist and Indo-Chinese Communist Party branch organs in Thailand). The Siam Communist Party's activities in Thailand throughout the decade were limited to very occasional leafletting and red-flags in Bangkok, and some very minimal work among peasants (most likely Vietnamese) in the Thai northeast, and some student-youth and labor work in Bangkok (very likely among Overseas Chinese). Concretely, it did not do much for Thailand, since objective conditions there made its very existence premature.

The commitment of the party's membership to liberation struggles elsewhere (China and Vietnam) explains why its very existence has been doubted by so many Thai and Western police and academic devotees of Comintern conspiratorial history in Asia. Nonetheless, while it existed largely to satisfy the formal requirements of the Comintern's "national parties" policy, and while it was clearly used for the real requirements of Vietnamese (and Chinese) revolutionaries in Thailand, the very presence of the latter was one of the important sources leading to the eventual formation of a radical Thai intelligentsia, a Thai Communist Party and an urban leftwing movement. Beyond this, however, the presence of Vietnamese (and Chinese) in the Siam Communist Party does not support, but rather negates the notion fostered by U.S. and Thai counter-revolutionary forces of a subversive, conspiratorial "vanguard" of non-Thai elements preparing for an alleged Vietnamese (or Chinese) invasion. The Vietnamese emigre centers in northeast Thailand were not vanguards, but in fact rear areas in the anti-imperialist struggle in Vietnam.

After the collapse of the South China revolutionary movement in 1927, the Thanh Nien group in 1929 at its First Congress (in Hong Kong) designated the northeast Thai emigre communities as "rest centers" for political refugees. Following the formation of the Indo-Chinese Communist Party and the failure of the Nghe-Tinh Soviets in 1930-31, many more revolutionaries took refuge in northeast Thailand's emigre communities as the latter became revolutionary bases in the struggle against the French. According to TCP accounts, by 1935-36 Thai government repression and police infiltration of Vietnamese revolutionary groups had led to the imprisonment or deportation of most of the Vietnamese membership in the Siam Communist Party. In the Popular Front era after 1935 the revolutionary significance of the northeast emigre communities diminished. With the Second United Front in China, the latter again became the chief foyers for the Vietnamese liberation struggle. Northeast Thailand would only become important again in the early forties.

III. The Thai Attitude, 1900-1945

To understand the reception of the Vietnamese emigres at the hands of the Thai it is necessary to distinguish between the Thai people and the Thai state—a distinction which, owing to bourgeois philosophical biases, is almost never observed. It is noteworthy that the Vietnamese emigres made this distinction, as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam has also done. American anthropologists and counterinsurgency bureaucrats have tended to equate Thai ruling class policies and politics with "the Thai people," and thereby posited an undocumented impression of "natural antipathy" or ethnic animosity between Thai and Vietnamese (as well as Chinese and other non-Thai groups in Thailand). As anyone familiar with the Thai and their language can verify, the Thai do have their local prejudices, ethnic Witticisms and regional jokes. Yet, in the case of the Vietnamese (as with the largest minority group, the Chinese) there is virtually no evidence of spontaneous, local, popular animosity on the part of the Thai. Indeed, in the relations between the two groups, there is much evidence that local Thai villagers often shielded Vietnamese from French and Thai police during the twentieth century.

The Thai state, on the other hand, has often manipulated ethnic differences between Thai and minority groups when this suited ruling class interests. Particularly (but not solely) in the twentieth century it has manufactured rivalries between the Thai and minority groups—the classic example here being the Chinese. It would appear that repression of the politically conscious, anti-imperialist northeast Vietnamese
emigres (not the politically apathetic, pre-imperialist “Old Vietnamese”) suited the needs of the Thai bureaucratic state during much of this century. The ultimate historic explanation for the Thai ruling class’ natural antipathy towards these emigres lies in the former’s organic linkage since the 1850s with capitalist imperialism, be it British, Japanese, or, presently, American. Since the bureaucratic monarchy’s conclusion of the Bowring Treaty in 1855, the Thai state has maintained its “independence” (meaning domestic political advantage over the masses) and indeed its very existence only at the sufferance of Western (and for a brief time Japanese) imperialism. It has survived only as a subordinate agent of imperialist exploitation of the Thai people, a role it accepted in return for continued domestic political hegemony. Despite evolutionary changes in the Thai ruling class as capitalist civilization penetrated Thailand since 1855, this historic linkage remained. With the disappearance of the absolute monarchy after 1932 and its replacement by a figurehead monarch overshadowed by a military bureaucratic class buttressed by a sybaritic (Chinese) bourgeoisie, the need for imperialist connections only increased. Anti-imperialism, therefore, could not and cannot be a popular cause with the Thai ruling elite.

Given the Thai state and its ruling classes’ relations with global imperialism after the mid-19th century, it is not surprising that the earliest Vietnamese anti-French colonial agitators were often harassed and deported by them at the behest of Indochina authorities, especially after 1908 (even though a few among Thai royalty sympathized with them as they did with likeminded Japanese Pan-Asiansists in Thailand in this era). After World War I and the creation of the French colonial police force, the Sûreté Générale, precisely to track down anti-colonial agitators, the Thai monarchy’s secret police continued to inform on the Vietnamese emigres and to pursue and deport them at Sûreté behest. In 1933, after formal anti-communist laws were passed by the new militarist government (with much royalist pressure), scores of Vietnamese anti-colonial revolutionaries were arrested and herded into the infamous Bangkhwan Prison in Nonthaburi Province, just north of Bangkok.

The post-1933 ruling military elite slavishly imitated the coercive techniques inherent in 19th and 20th century bourgeois nationalism and especially (though by no means solely) the overtly militarist dimension of German, Italian and Japanese bourgeois models. In this specific sense, they were nationally anti-French, and bore great resentment at the French seizure of Laos and Cambodian territories that the Thai state itself had acquired by force in earlier times. Though they harbored a deep rancor against the French Indochina regime on this count, they could not be, as noted above, opposed to the global imperialist system as such, for they too were reciprocally linked with it. They were therefore no more prepared to countenance anti-imperialist social revolution than their royalist predecessors before 1932. Just as the monarchy had identified “nation” with itself, the post-1933 militarist state identified “nation” with the militarist-functionary elite. They rightly sensed in the distinctly Marxist-Leninist revolutionary emigre communities in the northeast (after the Tinh Nien groups arrived in them in 1925) another kind of “nation” in which “nationalism” and the masses (peasants) were synonymous – a nationalism in which militarist elites had no place. To counter this dangerous sort of nationalism, they herded the Vietnamese emigres into prisons with greater vigor than ever (they did the same with Chinese revolutionary nationalists among the Chinese minority). At the same time, they fostered an artificial “nationalist” sentiment, based on a “traditional community” and “ethnic solidarity” that never existed. The post-1933 Thai state built its nationalism on an artificially-promoted racism that inevitably had repercussions on minorities and of course left the elitist structure theoretically intact.

Under military dictator Phibun Songkhram in the late thirties the Thai government disengaged from the faltering British empire system and gradually aligned itself with an
apparently ascendant Japanese imperialism. This new Thai-Japanese alignment eventually laid the basis for a common anti-imperialist front between the peoples of Thailand (and initially the emigres in the northeast), and the peoples of Indochina. This came about as the Japanese empire extended its military control first into Indochina, with French Vichy acquiescence, and then into Thailand in the early forties. During the ensuing Pacific War (1941-45) the Western powers unwittingly initiated and fostered this anti-imperialist solidarity. The Thai government under Phibun had, along with Japan, declared war on the Allies. Hence, British, American and Chinese secret services worked with various Thai and non-Thai minority groups who opposed the Phibun Songkram dictatorship and its alliance with Japan. This resulted in the arming of anti-Japanese and anti-Phibun guerrilla forces in the Thai Northeast (principally by the American OSS). At the same time, the Allies (and especially the OSS) were giving some assistance to Ho Chi Minh's Vietminh organization (est. May 1941) in the latter's efforts to resist the Japanese in Indochina and the Vichyite colonial regime of Admiral Jean Decoux that cooperated with the Japanese.

In the same year that the Vietminh was established, a similar organization, the Viet Kieu Cuu Quoc Hoi Thai Lao (Thailand-Laos Overseas Vietnamese National Salvation Association), or Cuu Quoc for short, was set up on the same pattern in the northeastern Thai town of Udorn Thani. It was composed of many veteran revolutionaries and its most important leaders were Indochinese Communist Party members who had fled to Thailand after the failure of the 1930 uprisings. It was one of a number of mass organizations adjunct to Ho Chi Minh's Vietminh. This Cuu Quoc association had its parallels in Chinese Communist Party United Front tactics after 1936 and in the numerous jiu guo (national salvation) groups that grew up under its sponsorship in the late thirties and early forties throughout China and in Bangkok as well. Throughout the Pacific War, the Cuu Quoc headquarters were located in the northeastern Thai town of Sakon Nakhon. Faced with the common Japanese enemy, a natural unity of anti-imperialist sentiment developed between the Northeastern Thai guerrilla movement (originally known as kloan ku ebat or National Salvation Group, only later as seri tbai or Free Thai) and the Vietnamese Cuu Quoc groups in the Northeast. The latter emigre associations were thus able to operate openly in Northeast Thailand during the war and to operate secretly against the Franco-Japanese imperialist regime in Laos as well.

The Vietnamese emigre communities in northeastern Thailand thus found themselves in the late stages of the Pacific War in a curious situation. They were bound through decades of revolutionary struggle with the ICP-led movement (the Vietminh after 1941). They were thus sympathetic to the developing Laos anti-colonial movement (itself influenced by the Vietminh model). They had a similar ideological bond with the northeastern Thai underground guerrilla movement armed by the Allies. These links would remain after the war and would eventuate in a common cause against the new hegemonic expansion of America in the region after 1945. Yet it is necessary to insist that, as responsible Thai police officials in moments of rare candor have admitted publicly (see documentation below), the emigres communities never lent themselves to revolutionary actions against the Thai government. In this, they remained faithful to the dictums of Ho Chi Minh in the twenties.

When the war ended, short-lived civilian governments of a somewhat leftist hue, though lacking in unity, came to the fore as the Thai military shrank back in disgrace from its former position of power. These governments were controlled by the chief symbol of domestic Thai underground resistance to the Japanese during the war, Dr. Pridi Phanomyong. Pridi's closest support lay with the northeastern Thai underground leaders during the war. Pridi himself supported the Vietnamese resistance to the restoration of the French colonial regime. He and his wartime northeastern supporters were approached at the war's end and asked by Ho Chi Minh's Vietminh organization for weapons to be used in resisting the French return. Pridi ordered that a portion of the northeastern underground group's weapons be put aboard a train and moved to the Cambodian border at Battambang and handed over to Vietminh forces. The arms were later used to outfit two Vietminh battalions in the anti-French struggle. Pridi permitted the Vietminh to open a liaison office in Bangkok headed by Tran Van Giau, key figure in the anti-French struggle in southern Vietnam. At the same time, sympathetic northeastern Thai guerrilla fighters crossed the Mekong in an effort to aid the Laotian peoples against the French there. Finally, just before his ouster from power, Pridi formed the Southeast Asia League to support anti-colonial movements in the region.

IV. French-Indochina War Era, 1946-1954

By 1946, the tide was already turning in favor of reaction. With American endorsement the French military returned in great force to Laos and, in several operations that year, they drove some 40,000,000 Vietnamese across the Mekong River into northeastern Thailand's border provinces. French planes strafed them in the water as they crossed. While Pridi-backed governments were still in power in Bangkok, these new refugees from French imperialism continued to receive official as well as popular support from the Thai. They were allowed to travel and choose their places of residence freely, and the government even loaned them living expense funds.

Here again it should be stressed that these were refugees from an extremely brutal military campaign by the French; they were not invaders. Thus, as their predecessors did, they respected Thai customs and got on well with the local populations. But perhaps even more than their predecessors, they looked upon their residence in Thailand as purely temporary; all wished to return to their homes as soon as possible. Indeed, they very likely would have been able to do so, were it not for the full support given by the United States to the French reconquest of Indochina, and to reactionary forces within Thailand. More than ever before, the now-swollen refugee populations of the northeast became the victims of Great Power intervention in the history of mainland Southeast Asia.

In 1947 disgruntled Thai military and police officers ousted the Pridi-backed government in a coup. The military's anger stemmed, of course, from the disgrace into which it had fallen, and for which they blamed Pridi, as well as on his having participated in the wartime anti-Japanese resistance movement. Many military units at war's end had found themselves in the far north of Thailand facing Chinese troops
and had been forced to disband and make their way back to central Thailand as best they could, usually by selling their weapons, clothing, etc.49 On top of this humiliation, the 1947 coup leaders were deeply disturbed at Pridi’s progressive policies towards revolutionary movements in the region. They were also angered at his policy of fair treatment for minorities, and at his lifting of the former militarist regime’s racist restrictions against Chinese, Moslem-Thai, Vietnamese and other minorities. The core leadership of the 1947 coup which brought the old pro-Japanese dictator Phibun back was explicitly anti-Chinese and anti-Vietnamese. At the same time it was profoundly fearful of the consequences for the elitist state of left-wing movements in Thailand and neighboring countries.50

As the Thai ruling class had done earlier in order to preserve its existence and privileges, the new regime now lost no time in 1950 aligning itself with another great imperial power—this time the United States. American dollars and military hardware easily persuaded the Thai militarists of the material benefits of a severe anti-communist policy, particularly in view of the mounting social unrest within the country itself. This Thai-U.S. alliance made Thailand immediately and officially the enemy of all the revolutionary peoples of Indochina then agitating for a more humane social and political system.51 With the old militarist and proven racist regime back in power in Bangkok, both the Overseas Chinese and the Vietnamese became the scapegoats for the ills of an endemically unjust and oppressive society. As the Phibun government—in U.S. rhetoric, the new champion of democracy in Southeast Asia—now joined hands with America and the French regimes of Indochina after 1950, the Vietnamese refugees in the Northeast found their movements and human rights increasingly restricted on the pretext that they were the vanguard of a North Vietnamese “communist invasion.”52 This charge also applied to northeastern wartime guerrilla leaders (and political opponents of Phibun) and was nurtured and promoted by a growing host of religiously anti-communist Americans who came to Thailand after 1949-50 as counterinsurgency advisors, technicians, and “altruistic” scholars.53

Following the ouster of the Pridi-backed government, Vietnamese refugees were obliged to relocate to 12 drought-ridden provinces in the northeast. They were prohibited from traveling outside this area without special permission of the director-general of police in Bangkok.54 In 1951, after General Phao Siyanon took over as director of police, the Vietnamese refugees were again forced to relocate into a smaller area of eight northeast border provinces. Again they were forbidden to travel outside this perimeter without permission from Bangkok, while local officials were given carte blanche authority to imprison them at any time without charge or trial.55 The repression worsened in 1953 when Phao’s police sent approximately 1000 Vietnamese males from these areas to be imprisoned in Phatthalung and Surat Thani Provinces in remote southwest Thailand.56

V. American-Indochina War Era, 1954-1975

In 1954 the Vietminh won a stunning victory over the French at Dien Bien Phu and the Geneva Conference ended the nine-year French effort to reconlosing Indochina. The United States now intensified its efforts to prop up the Saigon regime.57 American ambassador to Bangkok and powerful CIA figure Gen. W. Donovan insisted that the Thai government require the Vietnamese emigres in the northeast to repatriate to the American-controlled puppet regime in Saigon. Repatriation to the south would have been a much-needed propaganda victory for the Saigon regime’s claims to legitimacy despite its origins in French colonial policy. It would also have aided the incipient American anti-communist effort to create legitimacy for its puppet state as representative of the Vietnamese “nation.” The DRV protested, however, arguing that, among other things, 200 refugee families earlier sent back to Saigon had ended up in concentration camps.58

In the final throes of the fighting in Vietnam and Cambodia, there surfaced, quietly and anonymously in Thailand, an American Army study, obviously of Psy-Ops origin, entitled “External Support to the Thai Insurgency: the 35PL/NVA Combined Command.” It was circulated among Thai officials and in that section of the Bangkok newspaper world that served American anti-communist interests and was purported to be a Vietnamese master plan to bring the Western bank of the Mekong (meaning the northeast Thai border provinces) and indeed the lower Mekong watershed under Hanoi’s political and economic control.

The DRV insisted that the refugees, now numbering between 70-80,000, be allowed to choose for themselves. While the Americans and the Thai opposed this (as did the Saigon regime) the Thai were finally forced by international pressures and publicity to accede and agree in the so-called Rangoon Accords of 1959, signed by both the DRV and the Thai Red Cross societies. The Thai side agreed to maintain the refugees until means could be set up for their repatriation. The Thai Red Cross appointed a Central Committee for the Repatriation of Vietnamese Refugees to organize this task while the emigre communities themselves selected one of their own, the widely-respected Liem Tran, to sit on the committee.59

As the Thai official (a former director of police after the 1947 coup) in charge of the repatriation process was later forced to admit, of the 70,000 refugees who registered for repatriation, all but some 80 or 90 persons “voted with their feet” in indicating their desire to return to DRV jurisdiction. Even the most hostile witnesses had to admit that this was not only because many of them were from the central or northern parts of Vietnam but because they simply preferred Ho Chi Minh’s DRV to the American-created police regime in Saigon.60 In the longer historical perspective, this was in perfect conformity with the decades-long commitment of the Vietnamese emigres in the northeast to the liberation of their homeland, which they recognized in the DRV.61

Despite intense pressure from the south Vietnamese authorities (and no doubt from American officials as well) not to implement the 1959 Rangoon Agreement, the Thai government was obliged to do so by international publicity surrounding the issue and by “civil disobedience” agitation by the refugees themselves.62 Some 40,000 Vietnamese refugees of the early Vietminh-French war thus were duly repatriated by their own choice to the DRV. The repatriation process continued by sea until 1964 when the United States

37
effectively ended it with the beginnings of the genocidal air war that would eventually rain some six million tons of high explosives on the lands and peoples of Laos and Vietnam.63

Well before the repatriation process was blocked by American intervention in Indochina, Thai official repression of those who remained had reached new heights of brutality and had wrought numerous protests from the DRV. The state's police tyranny in this regard was especially pronounced after 1957, when General Sarit seized power, with American support, from Phibun and Phao. With greater infusions of U.S. dollars, more terrifying anti-communist and racist institutions were set up.64 Exact figures may never be known but independent Thai sources estimate that after 1957 at least an average of 200 to 300 Vietnamese refugees per year were jailed without charge or trial in such formidable prisons as Latbuakhtao near Korat (site of key Pentagon and CIA counter-insurgency operations), and Bangkhen and Setsiri prisons in Bangkok. Some languished in these jails for years, as their forbears had done in the thirties and early forties. Many were women and, by a 1974 count, about thirty were children under 16 years of age. In these same years, other refugees in the northeast became the victims of shootings, robberies and other acts of violence, with little or no action taken against their assailants by police. (In fact police were sometimes the assailants).

At the same time a hate campaign was launched against the refugees by Thai authorities, who pictured them as "spies," "terrorists," and dangerous "communists."65 There was little new, of course, in this campaign: the Thai state had had years of experience in conducting them against the Chinese minority. However, the anti-Vietnamese campaign was reinforced by American counterinsurgency research.66 This tended to paint the ominous picture of the refugee communities as a "small vanguard of Vietnamese race and culture" in Thailand, as one Pentagon technocrat wrote in a lengthy study of them (published by Cornell University Press).

Numerous Thai government agencies, some created under the impetus of U.S. counterinsurgency programs (e.g., the National Security Council, the Communist Suppression Operations Command, the Central Bureau of Information, the National Security Command, the Special Branch Police, the Vietnamese Refugee Bureau and especially the Interior Ministry) expended huge sums of money in surveillance and supervision of the "refugee problem."72

With the October 1973 Student Uprising and the ouster of the Thanom-Phaphat dictatorship, a brief interlude followed in which parliamentary forms were instituted and the military, while remaining intact, temporarily moved to the sidelines (principally to reorganize its internal clique power structure).73 During this period, in which there was relative press freedom in Thailand, the Vietnamese refugees in the northeast made desperate efforts to bring their plight to the attention of the Thai people. Hundreds of Vietnamese heads of families and individuals addressed letters to progressive Bangkok newspapers, detailing the brutalities and the repression of their human rights.74

The refugee position became even more precarious in the spring of 1975 with the fall of the rightwing dictatorships supported by the United States in Cambodia and Vietnam, and the obvious ascendancy of the popular Pathet Lao movement in that neighboring country. Some factions within the Thai
government sought to accommodate with ungovernable realities—a strategy that foreign observers have oft noted as a hallmark of Thai foreign relations. Such moves were especially evident with the Thai foreign ministry, which tried to move Thailand toward a rapprochement with its new socialist neighbors, as well as with China. One dimension of this was the civilian government’s acquiescence to student and popular demands for the removal of American military bases and forces from the country. Such demands had been in the air since the October 1973 uprising, contrary to some American academicians, was in fact as much anti-American as anti-Prathat-Thanom.75

It was obvious that neither the Thai military-police rightwing nor their American counterinsurgency supporters could countenance this situation with complacency. The experts on “black propaganda” of the American intelligence community who had already been operating full time in constructing a “bloodbath syndrome” to assuage American conscience in regard to America’s genocidal policies in Vietnam and Cambodia. They now went into action, in coordination with their Thai protégés, to block any Thai accommodation with their socialist neighbors. In the final throes of the fighting in Vietnam and Cambodia, there surfaced, quietly and anonymously, in Thailand an American military study, obviously of Psy-ops origin, entitled “External Support to the Thai Insurgency: the 35PL/NVA Combined Command.” It was circulated among Thai officials and in that section of the Bangkok newspaper world that served American anti-communist interests and was purported to be a Vietnamese master plan to bring the Western bank of the Mekong (meaning the northeast Thai border provinces) and indeed the lower Mekong watershed under Hanoi’s political and economic control. Accordingly, the chief Bangkok press spokesman for U.S. business interests in Thailand, the English-language Business in Thailand, ran an article in May 1975 describing the Vietnamese as “an aggressive, acquisitive and xenophobic race imbued with delusions of superiority and a Messianic sense of manifest destiny. It can be safely concluded that the Vietnamese have not lost the will, the appetite nor the determination for conquest . . . .” A similar article appeared at the same time in Bangkok’s major English-language daily (and a widely-known servant of U.S.

interests in Thailand), the Bangkok Post. Both were inspired by the U.S. Army Psy-War study which had surfaced in the early spring.76

American intelligence and psychological warfare operations of this type were clearly aimed at creating an anti-communist panic among Thai (and Americans) concerning the revolutionary Cambodian and Vietnamese victories of April 1975, with the ultimate design of “destabilizing” the Thai democratic experiment that followed October 1973 and restoring a pro-U.S. rightwing dictatorship.77 As this orchestrated program proceeded, Thai rightwing groups (with well-established connections to U.S.-created counterinsurgency units and commands) joined in the chorus.

The most vocal of these at this point was the neo-fascist Narawphon organization, linked both to the United States and to its Thai counterinsurgency offspring, the Internal Security Operations Command (kong amnoi kwan raks ka khrumrak phai tao, or ISO).78 Narawphon’s flamboyant spokesman and former foreign student in the United States, “Dr.” Watthanai Khiewimon, in one of his first public pronouncements following the appearance of the “Narawphon Foundation” in March 1975, asserted that the progressive students who brought democratic processes back to Thailand were really part of a vast communist plot, part of which was to seize the northeastern provinces and annex them to a “Greater Indochina” or even to China.79

General Krit Siwara, whose relatively moderate military clique held real power behind the parliamentary scene after October 1973, felt threatened by Narawphon’s ultra-rightwing appeal and publicly denounced its demagoguery. Krit rejected Watthanai’s anti-communist fear-mongering and scoffed at the idea communist forces planned to seize the Northeastern provinces.80 The demagoguery went on, however, and it took its inevitable toll upon the Vietnamese refugees, whose numbers were now swollen by recent arrivals from the final struggle in Vietnam. In May 1975, the northeastern emigre communities were the target of massive pogroms and riots which the then-deputy minister of interior flatly declared were instigated by the American CIA to embarrass the Thai government in its relations with the new socialist Viet.81

The minister of defense, Praman Adireskan, who had himself made a number of anti-Vietnamese refugee statements, nonetheless asserted that the riots in the Northeast looked like the work of Narawphon.82

In line with this same hate program, some (though by no means all) military-police officials, civil bureaucrats and politicians—the latter symbolized best by Samak Sunthonwet, the “Spirit of the Rightwing” (as he openly dubbed himself)—turned upon the refugee communities as a ready-made means for blocking accommodation with the socialist countries of Indochina. The revolutionary and egalitarian paths these countries were now embarking upon obviously discomfitted the Mercedes-Benz elites of Bangkok and their American supporters and it became necessary to distort the nature of these revolutions in the eyes of the Thai public. In conformity with the U.S. Psy-War themes noted above, a massive campaign grew to link the Vietnamese refugees’ presence in the border areas with alleged “invasion plans” harbored by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam for capturing northeastern Thailand. The Vietnamese refugees in the northeast were again cast in the role of “vanguards.”83

By December 1975, the Thai National Security Council was pointing to the DRV and the “800,000 American rifles”...
left behind there by fleeing American client troops as a grave danger for Thailand. It specifically singled out the possibility of a "fifth column" operating for "North Vietnam" among the estimated 70,000 Vietnamese refugees within the country.

In the same month, December 1975, the Thai monarch, King Phumiphon (Bhumibol), whose reign almost exactly spanned the American neo-colonization of Thailand, and whose fascination for American material culture from jazz to professional mystique of the Green Berets and M-16 rifles is widely known, called upon the country to prepare to defend the nation's independence and sovereignty. "Thailand is now a direct target of an enemy who wants to control our country," he declared. "The enemy is directing its forces against us. This has developed to such a serious stage that it is a direct aggression against the country." These statements, together with vague references to 'sabotage,' etc., placed the King squarely on the side of the anti-Vietnamese movement within the country.84

Against this campaign, the Thai foreign office moved for a normalization of relations with the now-independent DRV. High on the agenda in discussions with the DRV after the spring of 1975 was the issue of repatriating the remaining refugees from the French Indochina War per the 1959 Rangoon Agreements. These talks culminated in the July 20, 1976 visit to Bangkok of the deputy foreign minister of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam—an event that seems to have galvanized the Thai right-wing forces within and outside the government into a drastic action. Beginning just after this visit, military and right-wing-controlled newspapers and radio launched a massive rumor campaign implying that the refugee communities were bristling with arms and deeply involved in sabotage and "infiltration" plots throughout the country.

Specifically anti-Vietnamese hate groups sprang up suddenly—too suddenly to be spontaneous—to organize rallies and mob violence against the refugees. These included, among others, the "Patriots' Group" operating in Nakhon Phanom Province, and the well-organized "Anti-Vietnamese Refugee Group of Thailand" operating in Sakhon Nakhon and Udorn Tai Provinces and elsewhere. In the nightmarish days that followed, Thai police arrested without charge some 16,000 refugees in the northeast, southeast, and southwest—roundups in the latter two areas comprising mostly refugees from the last days of the Saigon regime. Widespread police sweeps of Vietnamese were carried out in Bangkok itself. In Sakhon Nakhon and Nakhon Phanom Provinces in the northeast, mobs of technical school students and unemployed village hoodlums ruthlessly sacked the refugee settlements there in August and September. The mobs even attacked local civil and police officials who tried to protect the refugees.85

The sources of this agitation and mob violence in the late summer 1976 appear to have been the vice-minister of the interior, Samak Sunthonwet, and, more indirectly, the Internal Suppression Operations Command (ISOC). Samak Sunthonwet made a number of public inflammatory charges concerning the Vietnamese refugees and made no secret of his distaste for the foreign office and its conciliatory policy towards the newly independent socialist states of Indochina. He attacked the foreign office and the Seni Pramot government then in power, arguing that, while the rightwing had put it into office, it was not acting in accord with rightwing philosophy. He accused the foreign minister, in fact, of preferring friendship with the SRV and socialist Laos over that of Thailand's old friend, the United States.86 Samak also indicated his displeasure at the attitude of the police forces under his own ministry's control because high police officials were denying publicly what Vice-Minister Samak was alleging about the Vietnamese in August. The director of the Special Branch Police, Police Major General Sanath Thanaphumhi, denied that he had ever sent in reports to the premier concerning Vietnamese plots and saboteurs. The deputy director of the Special Branch Police, Col. Kasem Saengmit, was even more explicit: "We have been following the movements of every national who might have any desire to upset the security of this country," he avowed, "but we are not in a position to say whether or not the Vietnamese refugees are going to commit any acts of sabotage . . ." Other high police officials, when queried by the Thai press, laughed at the entire matter of the Vietnamese as a threat to the country's security. Samak indicated to the press that he would soon move in and control the police more closely.87 He did so, to the misfortune of the Vietnamese, and to Thailand's democracy.

It seems clear that the Internal Suppression Operations Command (ISOC) also had a hand in the rightwing agitation about the Vietnamese in the late summer and early fall. In early September 1976, the governor and deputy governor of Sakon Nakhon Province and the deputy governor of Udorn Thani Province (both areas with a longtime Vietnamese emigre presence) gave press interviews publicly accusing certain Bangkok political factions, including certain national assembly deputies, of inciting the rural mobs to riot against the Vietnamese. They made it clear that the political motivation behind this was a plan to use the Vietnamese refugees as an issue to "destabilize" the government and thereby to block any Thai-Vietnamese diplomatic rapprochement. Although the deputy governor of Sakon Nakhon Province, himself a longtime count-insurgency expert, expressed doubts that the American CIA was directly involved in the mounting wave of paranoia, he did not hesitate to tell the press that ISOC headquarters had just forwarded to him documents that alleged that the SRV had a plan to seize several provinces in northeast Thailand, including his own. He showed great skepticism about this and, with the other officials just mentioned, made it clear that the furor was artificially created. "I definitely think," he said, "that there are political motivations, both domestic and foreign, in this matter . . ."88

The implication seemed clear from this that both the Thai and the Americans were involved in the matter. ISOC and the Americans were further implicated in the furor over the Vietnamese refugees in mid-September. At least two independent Thai journals at this point reported that the Thai Red Cross had unilaterally reorganized the Central Committee for the Repatriation of the Vietnamese Refugees, and had ousted from it the Vietnamese Liem Tran. Liem Tran's reputation for integrity among the northeastern emigres was such that the Thai had continuously appointed him to the Central Committee in its various reorganizations since 1959. Like the other emigres in the northeast since the 1930s onward, there was no doubt where his loyalties lay: with the Ho Chi Minh-led national liberation movement and the SRV. After removing Liem from the Central Committee, and, without consulting the refugee communities, the Thai

---

84 On July 2, 1976, the official name of the happily liberated and united
Vietnam became the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, or SRV. —The
editors.

85

86

87

88
VI. Reactionary Thailand, October 6 and After

Thailand's brief interlude of at least quasi-parliamentary government came to a violent end on October 6, 1976 when U.S.-trained and armed rightwing military and paramilitary forces massacred innocent and unarmed Thai students in and around Thammasat University in Bangkok. Not surprisingly, on the day of the carnage, rightwing military and civilian sources were circulating rumors that "Vietnamese saboteurs" were present within Thammasat University campus. Not the slightest evidence for this was ever forthcoming.

The Vietnamese refugee communities were now completely at the mercy of extremist rightwing forces. The independent Thai press that had for three years tried to publicize their plight was silenced, and no help could be expected from the servile journals that remained for they were now devoted solely to publicizing the doings of royalty, sporting events, beauty contests and the like, as had largely been the case before 1973. Given this socially and politically rapid reportage, the case of the Vietnamese refugees was now, in an urgent new sense, in the hands of those correspondent of major Western news services who were acceptable to the new regime. Unfortunately for the Vietnamese, the Western establishment press demonstrated a not-unprecedented naivety in accepting the old anti-communist line about the Vietnamese minority. As the daily arrests and violence against the refugees after October 6 were duly reported by the Washington Post, New York Times and Le Monde throughout the late fall of 1976, the correspondents seriously challenged neither the underlying premise that the refugees were a security threat or the "vanguard" theory which had been propounded over the years by U.S.-Thai counterinsurgency experts. None reported the salient fact that even high Thai police and provincial officials had, a few short months previously, completely discounted this idea. More gravely, the great press representatives of the "Free World" did not appear to question the deeper premise underlying Thai government claims that Vietnam—a country upon which the United States had just dropped 4 million tons of bombs, killed 1.7 million people, wounded 3.2 million, rendered homeless 12 million persons, sprayed 18 million gallons of poison chemical defoliants which denuded 6 million acres of Vietnam's foodlands, left hundreds of tons of unexploded ordnance buried in the land and, with all this, profoundly traumatized the social fabric of the Vietnamese people—that this country, Vietnam, was going to leap up and attack its neighbors without so much as drawing a breath.

All that the major Western newspapers could do was intone the timeworn counterinsurgency cliches: "... Thais have long feared and disliked the Vietnamese among them..." The Vietnamese had "remained clannish and... very few have married Thais or otherwise attempted to assimilate..." "... [T]he economically influential Vietnamese community has been regarded by many as a breeding ground for guerrillas and a channel for Hanoi's support of the [domestic Thai] rebellion..." With this kind of "perceptive" reportage, it would be difficult not to feel that the Vietnamese deserved the violence then being heaped upon them in the northeast.

Plainly, the long struggle of the Vietnamese communities in northeast Thailand was entering a new stage of tragedy and suffering as they continued to be the victims of manipulation at the hands of U.S.-Thai counterinsurgency programs and, in a larger sense, victims of the great American expansionist, anti-communist program that has held Thailand in its grip for the last quarter of a century.

Prospects for the repatriation of the Vietnamese to their homeland looked promising until October 6 and the military coup but, despite SRV attempts to hold the new Thai government to the earlier agreements reached by the pre-October 6 elected government, the possibility of progress towards repatriation was stifled by the new official Thai policy of anti-communism and chauvinist racism. The violence against the Vietnamese communities prompted the SRV's Red Cross to cable Thailand's Queen Sirikit, patroness of the Thai Red Cross, protesting the violations of human rights. As the SRV protests mounted, the new government called a press conference on November 18, 1976, and Premier Thanin and his foreign minister assured foreign correspondents that not only did Thailand support in principle the admission of the SRV into the UN but it also believed that the agreement of August 1976 signed between the former government and Hanoi concerning the normalization of relations between the two countries should be pursued. Yet the Premier's emphasis on a rabid anti-communist policy domestically, coupled with the continuing anti-Vietnamese hate campaign, belied the sincerity of these words.

Almost coincidental with this press conference, the submissive and sensationalist Thai press was spreading the rumor that Vietnamese restaurants were injecting chemicals into their noodles—chemicals which reportedly shrunk male sex organs. Thousands of Thai men reportedly rushed to hospitals as a result.

Perhaps most symbolic of the new government's anti-Vietnamese campaign was the emergence and preeminence of the former vice minister of the interior under the previous Seni Premot government, Samak Sunthuwat. Samak was indeed, as he earlier dubbed himself for newsmen in the summer of 1976, the "Spirit of the Rightwing." He was closely linked to the pre-October 6 neo-fascist movements, was an avowed hero of the rightwing hooligan band, the Krathong.

* The official Thai press put the death toll at around forty or fifty, the Western press put it at around 100, while the actual figure, according to the most reliable of all sources, was not less than 300 dead.}

45
Daeng (Red Gaus or Red Bulls), and had close connections with the Internal Security Operations Command which had a crucial part in the October 6 coup. Samak himself was said to have played an important role in the events of October 6. At any rate he emerged from the coup as the new military government’s chief spokesman and ideologue for national chauvinism, racism, anti-communist paranoia— with an unswerving loyalty to the principles of the militarist state: Nation, Buddhism, King. He was also the most consistent advocate of the anti-Vietnamese hate campaign.99

As he had predicted he would do earlier in the summer of 1976, several months before the coup, Samak took the position of minister of interior when the new government lineup was announced on October 6. This put him in a position to purge the interior ministry and the police department of those who had shown less enthusiasm than he in the anti-communist, anti-Vietnamese campaign. After clearing the decks with transfers of his political enemies within the police structure, he was free to indulge his whims.100 On December 9 1976, he called a press conference in his office to “reveal” a secret Vietnamese plan under which the Socialist Republic of Vietnam was going to invade Thailand in February 1977.

The details of this conference, and of the “plan,” lay bare the intimate connection between the insoluble social problems within Thai society as it is presently structured, and the state’s policy of manipulating minorities for its special interest. According to Samak, February 15 1977 was “D-Day” for the secret SRV plan for the invasion. Prior to this, however, the SRV somehow was going to incite labor troubles, beginning around December 15, that would lead to workers’ general strikes in business firms, plants and factories. This would be accompanied by troubles among the northeastern Vietnamese refugees, who would pretend, apparently, to fall to fighting among themselves. These in turn would lead to a diplomatic “misunderstanding” with the SRV and serve as a pretext for the latter’s military forces to invade Thailand. Samak even laid out the routes of the invasion: (1) through the mountainous north, where the Thai, Laos and Burmese borders converge; (2) from southern Laos across the Mekong towards Ubon Ratchathani; and (3) out of western Cambodia through Arannya Prathet. The interior minister noted that all three routes had been surveyed and were dry enough for SRV tanks to pass. Finally, he announced that the SRV did not really wish to repatriate the refugees in the northeast but on the contrary really planned to use them as the vanguard in an invasion of Thailand.101

The precise function that the Vietnamese communities serve in the official manipulative policies of the Thai state today is patent in Samak’s remarks. First of all, as the SRV recognized in its protests to the post-October 6 government, anti-communism, and in this case, virulent anti-Hanoi communism, is an obvious device for focusing the Thai people’s minds on issues other than their own society’s gross injustices, inhumanities and huge socio-economic disparities.102 Hence the frantic propaganda activities of leaders such as Interior Minister Samak. Secondly, in regard to those numerous Thai people, peasants, workers, underpaid and oppressed bureaucratic and military-police functionaries and others who are already dangerously conscious of the oppressive conditions of their society, “disturbances,” work stoppages and the like can easily be linked with the great “threat” from Hanoi and the Vietnamese refugees (as Samak clearly did) and thus officially be declared subversive. In a sense, then, the refugees are serving a useful “function” for the militarist rulers of present-day Thailand: like the Chinese before them, they are a tool to be manipulated by the ruling class for its own interests.

One of those who saw this most clearly in the case of official Thai treatment of both Chinese and Vietnamese minorities was the late Dr. Boonsanong Punyodyana, eminent Thai sociologist, recognized expert on minority problems in Thailand, leader of the constitutional movement that ousted the Thanom-Prapatthdictators in 1973, founder of the Thai Socialist Party in 1974 and, as a humanist and Marxist critic, an outspoken opponent of the oppressive Thai bureaucratic state.* Not long before he was shot down by rightwing assassins virtually in front of his own home in early 1976, he was writing and speaking on behalf of minorities in Thailand. He saw through the self-serving dimension of the counter-insurgency approach to minority problems in Thailand, including that concerning the Vietnamese. He recognized in it the old divisive strategy of the British, Dutch, French, Japanese and more recently the Americans: sustain the conquest of the conquered by dividing them against themselves. He recognized, against the counterinsurgency view, that there was no natural or innate animosity between ethnic Vietnamese, Thai, Chinese or other groups. On the contrary, he saw that the issue was in fact only historical and sociological:

... the plight of minority groups in Thai society is due not to the prejudice and discrimination of majority people... It is the privileged ruling class with its permeating and subversive mechanisms that lie at the root of the problem.103

The plight of the Vietnamese in the Northeast is indeed not due to the prejudice of the Thai people, as this brief review has demonstrated. It is due to the machinations of the Thai state. The great social upheaval in Indochina that really began over 200 years ago with the Tay-son Rebellion and that produced royalist refugees in the 18th century has now produced another class of refugees with a vivid revolutionary consciousness. As we have seen, they have never indulged in revolutionary activity against Thailand, and in that sense the “vanguard theory” of the counterinsurgency technocrats is a mockery of the truth. Yet in a sense quite different from that, they are indeed a “vanguard,” not for any Vietnamese ethnic conquest of Thailand, for that category of action disappeared with the Vietnamese puppet state upon the liberation of Saigon in April 1975. Rather they function merely as exemplars of a people who have successfully overthrown domestic oppressive elites and cast out the decadent presence of foreign imperialism. In that historic sense, they are the distant echoes of those “roaring armies” of the old Tay-son rebels, come back to haunt the present privileged rulers of Thailand and their imperialist supporters of today with the spectre of social revolution. 

* See Carl Trocki’s article on Boonsanong in this issue.
Notes

(Thai words in the text and notes are rendered in a modified "Cornell" system. All diacritical marks have been omitted in Thai, Chinese, Vietnamese and Japanese transliterations.)

1. Earliest contacts between the Nguyen of Hue and the Thai in connection with the Tay-son Rebellion actually date to the reign of the King of Thonburi, Sometdet Prajao Taksin (r. 1777-1822). Important primary sources on these and later Thai-Nguyen contacts include Pongsawaduan yuen (Vietnamese Chronicles); Bangkok, 2 vols., 1899, esp. vol. II, 370ff; this work is a translation by one Nai Yon, edited by Luang Damrong Thammasa and Nai Wan, of a Vietnamese nqxem text, possibly entitled Vietnamese su-ky: Jaophraya Thi Phakorawong, comp., Phranarach pbon-sawadun kruang rattakosin: ratcaban sib unng (Dymanic Chronicles, Bangkok Era, First Reign), Bangkok, 1961 passim.


2. Damrong Ratchanuphap, Ruom ruang kio koy koy lae khamen samai rattakosin (Collected Matters Concerning the Vietnamese and Khmer in the Bangkok Era), Bangkok, 1964, 251 ff. Bui Quang Tung, "Contribution à l'étude des colonies vietnamiennes en Thaïlande," France-Asie XV:148 (Sept. 1958), 440 (this work, like the Poole study cited below, should be used with caution not only because of its untrained anti-communist bias, typical of the Ecole francaise d'extreme orient, of which Bui was a member, but because it is largely based on interviews with conservative, often Catholic, "Old Vietnamese," from which Bui drew judgments about more recent, militant Vietnamese revolutionaries); G. Boudard (trans.), "Phan Boi Chau Memoires," France-Asie XXII:194-95 (1968), 117 note 120.

3. I construe the term "nationalism" in the sense suggested by Anouar Abdell-Malek in La Dialectique sociale, Paris, 1972, Part II: "Le phénomène nationaliste." Nationalism is theoretically conceived as a genetic and dialectical category wherein bourgeois nationalism is merely one historic form specified by its time-space milieu and further by characteristic economic, social and ideological arrangements. Theoretical writing on this subject, including much in the Marxist genre, tends to be heavily Eurocentric. In addition to the writings of Abdell-Malek, those of Abdal Lahari (e.g., "Marx and the Intellectual from the Third World: or the Problem of Historical Retardation Once Again," Dioegnes, No. 64 [Winter, 1968], 118-40) and the works issued by the Centre d'études et de recherches marxistes (C.E.R.M.K.), which often appear in La Pensée, are important Marxist theoretical alternatives to this problem.


6. Boudard, 117; note 120; Marr, loc. cit.

7. On Phan Boi Chau see Boudard, passim; Marr, esp. chap. 4 ff. Kawamoto to Kunle, "Han hai shui shoshi" (Brief History of Phan Boi Chau) in Nagoaka S., Kawamoto K. (eds.), Betonamu Eborokubii (History of the Fall of Vietnam), Tokyo, 1966, 223-55. In reference to note 3 above, Phan Boi Chau's career spanned two genres of nationalism: (1) a traditional literati style, conforming to what Joseph Levenson called "culturalism" (Liang Chi-ch'ao and the Mind of Modern Chia [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967], 109 ff) and (2) an incipient recognition of socialist nationalism in 1924-25. Unlike Sun Yat-sen, for example, Phan never spoke for bourgeois nationalism.

8. Nagoaka and Kawamoto, 143-46: this is a Japanese translation of Phan's Nguc Trung Thu (Prison Notes); Tran Dan Tien, Hu zi ming cibuan (Ho Chi Minh Biography), Shanghai, 1948, 85-86: a Chinese translation of Nguc Trung Thu's Doi Hout Dong cu Ho Chi Tich (Anecdotes from Chairman Ho's Life) the earliest and in some ways the most explicit biography of Ho Chi Minh. Western-language versions are much abridged.

9. Le Minh Trinh memoirs in Hu bo bo, Hanoi, 1962, 94; a complete Chinese translation of Bac Ho, Hoi Ky (Reminiscences on Uncle Ho), Hanoi, 1960 (Western-language versions contain crucial lacunas); Tran Dan Tien, 85-86.


12. Le Minh Trinh in Hu bo bo, 94; Tran Hoai Nam, Yuenan remin de jiefeng dousheng (Liberation Struggles of the Vietnamese People), Peking, 1954, 61. Among those sent to Canton at this time was a youth born in Thailand, Ly Tu Trong (Le Van Trong), who joined the Thant Thien group at age 15. He was arrested, tortured and gullioned by the French Sûreté in 1931. Brief biography in Vietnam, No. 92 (1965), unpag.


14. Conseil Paysan International, 1re Conférence Internationale Paysanne: Thèses, Messages, et Adressses, Paris, n.d. (but late 1923) includes a manifesto of the French delegation (= Ho Chi Minh) to peasants and women of the world, written in mid-October, 1923; Nguyen Ai Quoc (sic = Ho Chi Minh), "La Situation du Paysan Annamite," Le Pora, December 1921, 1, reprinted in La Vie Ouvrière, January 1, 1924, 3, as "En Asie: La Situation des Paysans" with an additional lengthy article on peasants in China signed Ng. Ai Quoc. These were sent to Paris from Russia, where Ho Chi Minh traveled, studied and observed Soviet life from late 1923 to late 1924.


16. Foregoing based on testimony of Le Minh Trinh and Tran Lam in Hu bo bo, 93-107, 108-114: both these men were Thanh Nien cadres with Ho in Thailand; Gouvernement général, IV, 24-25; Tran Dan Tien, 85-90. See also the excellent essay by Tran Van Dinh, "The Rhetoric of Revolt: Ho Chi Minh as Communicator," Journal of Communications, Autumn, 1976, 142-47.

17. Le Minh Trinh in Hu bo bo, 106.


19. Tru'ong Chinh, Our President Ho Chi Minh, 94.

20. Hu bo bo, 106.


22. TCP, 1974, 6-8 explains that one of the unique features of the Thai revolutionary movement lay in that it derived its early theoretical Marxist-Leninist impetus directly from Asian (Chinese and Vietnamese) sources rather than from Europe, as was the case with almost all other revolutionary movements in Asia.

23. TCP, 1974, 9.

24. For example, the SiRÈTE coloniale specifically noted in 1933 that the purpose of the Thanh Nien groups in agitating among Vietnamese in Thailand was to create a party in Indochina and not abroad. *Gouvernement général*, IV, 18.

25. TCP, 1974, 9.


27. Ibid., 43-44, 61: designates Ngo Chinh Quoc and Ngo Chinh Hoc as leaders of the "communists annamites" in *Laos*.

28. TCP, 1974, 9. This source also indicates that Chinese cadres in the Siam CP underwent a similar fate owing to government suppression of anti-Japanese agitation by them after Japan’s invasion of North China in 1937. I believe this heavy suppression of Chinese and Vietnamese cadres by the Thai government was a key factor in the formation of a truly Thai Communist Party in 1942.


30. See the text and notes below for examples in this genre.

31. Vietnamese testimony in Le Manh Trinh and Tran Lam memoirs in *Hoa bo bo*, 93-107, 108-14; Tran Dan Tien, 85-90, esp. 88; Liem Tran interview in *Sa*, 1:5 (16 March 1974), 29-30 (Liem Tran was the chief spokesman for the Vietnamese communists in Northeast Thailand during the fifties, sixties and early seventies). Thai confirmation of this point comes in numerous non-governmental sources, e.g., Suwanit Naphakorn, "Rao ma jaspum khoon yai tu ban thoedt!" (Let’s Continue to Seize the Vietnamese!) in the issue of *Sa* just cited, 12-15. This was a special issue of the National Students Center of Thailand on minorities in Thailand. See also Kua Munophon (pseud.), "Yuan ophayop ... phoiongmuang phret song" (Vietnamese Emigrants - Second-Class Residents), *Mabarat*, March 23, 1974, 16 ff.


34. Le Manh Trinh, in *Hoa bo bo*, 106, describes his arrest by the Thai government and subsequent deportation to Swatow with some ten other comrades.

35. See Thadeus Flood, "The Thai Leftwing in Historical Perspective," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (April-June 1975), 57-58 and notes 34 and 35. This article, published two years ago, may be useful to readers who are not familiar with certain aspects of Thai history covered in these pages.

36. Yano Toru, *Tai-bisima gendai seiji-shi kenkyuu* (Studies in the Political History of Modern Thailand-Burma) (Kyoto, 1968), 168-69, 228 ff, is the first and only researcher known to me to have seen the historical archival material of this chapter of amorphous mass movements, such as pamahakar, phra ramakar or Nation, Buddhism and King that was generated in the reigns of Rama VI and VII, and that has been used since that time by the ruling class in Thailand as an ideological instrument of coercion and control. The classic statement of this constellation of amurrupt ideas appeared first in Wijit Matra (Sang Kaikanakaphan), *Lak thai* (the Thai Polity), *Bangkok*, 3rd ed., 1935. It first appeared in 1928, when it was awarded a royal prize. This notion of *lak thai* has its equivalents in the Nazi *Festungskultur* or the Japanese fascist *koku* and its local symbols of other bourgeois nation states, used to foster orthodoxy and uncritical loyalty.


38. R. Harris Smith, OSS: *The Secret History of America's First Central Intelligence Agency* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 311, claims that 175 tons of equipment had reached the Thai underground by war's end. For a brief discussion of the significance for Thai social-political history of the wartime anti-Japanese resistance see Flood, "Thai Leftwing ...", 58 and notes 39, 40, 41.


40. Tran Van Dinh, "The Birth of the Pathet Lao Army," 428 and note 8 (Tran was a Vietminh cadre in contact with Vietnamese emigres on the Thai-Laos border in late 1945-46). Huynah Kim Khanh, 772-73; Chiang Yung-ching, 94 ff (on Chinese Communist Party *jiu guo* groups): Flood, "The Thai Leftwing ...", 58 and notes 39-42 (on Vietnamese *jiu guo* groups in Bangkok and the Thai *ku chat* group).


42. The ideological sympathy that bound Pridi to the northeastern Thai and to the Vietminh was well known to the wartime pro-Japanese government of Phibun Smachmotn, a key figure in the pre-war and wartime pro-Japanese clique of Phibun's: *Chai bai phoebon khorng khobphay* (My Life Through Five Reigns) (Bangkok, 1955), 241-42. Pridi's political support was heavily in the rural areas in 1946-47, owing to the essentially rural character of the wartime guerrilla movement under his general, Thajphai Burutphat, *Kammasu lae phai kammasu khorng thai* (Thai Politics and Political Parties) (Bangkok, 1968), 178-79.

43. Pridi Pitakpinyon, "Patronage in Thailand" (in *Reform*), 14-15. Pridi cites a letter from Ho Chi Minh according to which the two battalions were later dubbed the "Siam Battalions." On these Thai arms transfers to Vietnamese Ho Cui Quoc groups in Laos, see also Tran Van Dinh, 428 note 8.

44. *Vietnam Information Service* (Paris, 1947), 7-8; personal communication from Tran Van Dinh.

45. Loet Nikon, "S.sawang trachu: phu mai yom kom hua hia kap thorat faisi!" (Assemblyman Sawang Trachu: One Who Refused to Bow to the Fascist Dictators) *Mabarat*, No. 218 (9 August 1975), 13. An important serialized interview with a northeastern Thai wartime guerrilla leader, later Assembly deputy, still later political refugee (from Thai government political repression) in Laos, Hanoi and Peking, who took part in the brief northeastern Thai effort to aid the Laos anti-colonial struggle in 1944-45.

46. Two independent eyewitness accounts of these brutal French operations are Tran Van Dinh, 436 and Sawang Trachu in Loet Nikon, "S.s. sawang trachu ...", *Mabarat*, No. 271 (9-16 August 1975), 12. See also Prince Souphanouvong’s account of the French massacre at Thakhek on March 21, 1946, in *Anna Louise Strong, Cosg and Violence in Laos and Vietnam* (New York, 1962), 34.

47. Liem Tran interview in *Sa*, cited, 29; "Vietnam tai thai" (The Vietnamese in Thailand), *Prachabad*, No. 148 (September 1976), 8-9; Letter to the Editor signed by 80 Vietnamese from Mukdahan in
This is the unanimous import of all written communications I have seen from the emigre communities to Thai newspapers. A number of these are cited throughout this study.

58. Suwansit Naphakhrom, 13; Peter A. Poole, The Vietnamese in Thailand (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985, 3rd ed.); Seidman, ibid., note 67 below; Rit Ithipracha, 63 ff (the Thai counterinsurgency viewpoint—cf. note 69 below). General Donovan, another chief architect of U.S. counterinsurgency policy in Asia, had been a registered foreign agent for the Thai government in the United States during the end of World War II.

59. Poole, 61, 69. The Vietnamese refugee spokesman Ly Tran is erroneously referred to as "Lien Tan" by Poole. See Sun 1:5 (March 1974), 29-30, interview with Lien. Membership lists of this and subsequent repatriation committees in Phraebach, 3:148 (16 September 1976), 182.

60. Interview with Police General Luang Chattrakan Koson, Chairman of the Repatriation Committee (cf. note 54 above), ibid., 9-10; Suwansit Naphakhrom, 13; Boonsanong, 21; Poole, 58 and notes. 61. The same sentiments prevailed among the 100,000 Vietnamese in Western Laos before 1946. Tran Van Dinh, 424. Many of these fled to Thailand in 1946-47 to escape French brutality.

62. Boonsanong, "Minority Groups ..." 22; Poole, chap. V. 63. Letter signed by 80 Vietnamese from Mukdahan in Sangkhomsat Paribat 12:5 (May 1974), 7: "... in 1963 the Indochina War flared up again and the repatriation had to be halted ..."; Police General Luang Chattrakan Koson interview with Prachachab, cited, 8:10; "We sent them back [i.e., the refugees] in groups but this stopped some years back because the situation was changed where there was flooding and they could not enter the harbor." Yet Peter Poole, 65-66 and note 28, completely ignores this human issue and places the blame on the DRV for the halt in the repatriation! Counterinsurgency "scholarship" at its best.

64. E. Herbert, The United States and the Military Coup in Thailand (Berkeley: Indochina Resource Center, 1976), 2. Thomas Lobe's study, cited, is strictly devoted to the history of the Office of Public Safety and police aid to Thailand; it does not deal directly with Pentagon involvement, about which I know of no substantial study similar to Lobe's work.

65. Inter al.: Suwansit Naphakhrom, 13; 14: Prachaccha, issue cited above, 10 (citing "scores of letters" received by this journal asking for help); other Vietnamese refugee letters to Thai newspapers cited in this study.

66. Cf. note 33 above. In a June 6, 1969, discussion with Pentagon counterinsurgency Project JASON members, Louis Lomax, who had just returned from Thailand, revealed that Thai authorities were thinking of "transporting" (i.e., forcibly relocating) some 40,000 Vietnamese from the Northeast. The latter were discussed as a "problem" for American counterinsurgency scholars by JASON project members as early as June-July 1967, as witness this exchange: (General Maxwell B.) Taylor: "Did you look at the NVN colony in the Mekong valley and their role in insurgency?" (Cly, Institute of Technology Phystalus) "A very tricky question, but let's get conflicting answers. The Thai government believes they play an important role." The Student Mobilizer, 3:4 (April 1970), 10, 13. Every draconian technique levied against the Vietnamese communities in the northeast came up as a subject for discussion at one or another of these JASON, SEADAG, AACT meetings between government officials and American social scientists in the late sixties: the classic example of Marcuse's "one-dimensionality" in action (One-Dimensional Man [Boston: Beacon, 1964]).

67. The best example of American counterinsurgency research on the "Vietnamese problem" in Thailand is Peter A. Poole's work, from the "preface" of which the quote in the text is taken (p. vii). Poole, a veteran Pentagon Advanced Research Projects (ARPA) officer, based this widely touted study on testimony of U.S., Thai and south Vietnamese officials and of Vietnamese Catholic priests and their pastoral flocks in Thailand. He was unable to refer to any Thai or Vietnamese language materials in his 180-page study—a limitation that, while not necessarily crucial, is typical of the counterinsurgency writing and reflects the imperial arrogance inherent in it.

68. See text and note 87 below for documentation.

69. An excellent Thai-language example of this is Rit Ithipracha, "Vaan yae," cited previously. A typical rightwing, racist and anti-communist tirade against the Vietnamese communities in Thailand, it is heavily interlarded with U.S. counterinsurgency jargon. Apparently, the Thai government saw this as a progressive treatment of minorities (including the Thai minority) in socialist Vietnam, it carries a lengthy section on the Thai peoples in Vietnam—but written before World War II by Luang Wicht Watthakan, notorious spokesman for the old Phibun government's racist policies.
Most recognized it, however, as being an extension of CSOC and rejected it. In a classic CIA ploy, a phony letter from a non-existent newspaper in the United States accused Nawaphon in August 1975 of receiving $250,000 from the CIA, with the obvious aim of discrediting the widely recognized link between these two organizations. As Thai critics immediately pointed out, however, it really didn't need such funds, since its backers included old royalties, nobility, hotel owners, financiers, bankers, and the like, in addition to criminals, gangsters, and political-military types, and monks. Its secretariat was set up with Wattanina as Coordinator, and its first newspaper published in late August 1975. Mabarat, 29 March 1975, 4; id., 30 August 1975, 3; idem, 6 September 1975, 12; idem, 13 September 1975, 5; Aribpit, 18 April 1975, 5; id., 22 April 1975, 5; id., 8 July 1975, 1; id., 5 August 1975, 4. For the official explanation of the name "Nawaphon," see the first issue of its paper, Korn Prachabon, 28 August 1975, 2. 79. Mabarat, 29 March 1975, 6. 80. Details in Nawon Bangpakong's editorial, ibid., 4. 81. B.R.O.G. Andesson, et al., "Thailand Fact Sheet (1927-1976)," unpbl, ms. (Cornell University), 8. I do not know the original source for this. 82. Aribpit, 9 May 1975, 11; Mabarat, 6 September 1975, 12. 83. Chaturat, 17 August 1976, reviews this campaign well. 84. Quotations from The Asian Student, 20 December 1975 and 5 January 1976. 85. A brief chronology of these incidents following the DRV foreign minister's visit in Chaturat, 13 September 1976, 20-21. A copy of a very lengthy defense of the policies in detail against the refugees, distributed as flyers by the "Anti-Vietnam Refugees Group of Thailand," is on p. 22 of this issue. Other instances of violence against the refugees in these weeks are recorded in letters from 26 Vietnamese refugees in That Phon Distric, Nakhon Phnom Province, Chaturat, 7 September 1976, 2-3, and id., 28 September 1976, 3-4; letter from ten refugees from Muang District, Nakhon Phnom Province. 86. See interview with Interior Minister Samak in Chaturat, 7 September 1976, 31-32. For other inflammatory statements by the Interior Ministry, see Chaturat, 17 August 1976, 16-18. 87. The foregoing based on interviews with the persons mentioned by Chaturat, loc. cit. 88. Interviews with persons mentioned by Chaturat, 14 September 1976, 19-24. 89. Chaturat, 21 September 1976, 1; Prachabat, 16 September 1976, 11-12. On Liem Tran, see text, p. 23, and notes 31 and 39 above. 90. Chaturat, 28 September 1976, 6-7. On 18 September 1976 Premier Seni P---not virtually scoffed at the AP Bureau news report stating that the DRV had announced that it would extend its influence to all the countries of Indochina---an announcement that was in fact, to my knowledge, never made in that context. See Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Thailand, 21 September 1976. 91. The "most reliable of all sources" in this case is one that naive Western press correspondents would never think of consulting the Chinese Benevolent Society, known locally as the Po Tek Tung, which is by hoiy tradition responsible for gathering up corpses in Bangkok. Anonymous #1, a source in Bangkok, obtained this information directly from the Po Tek Tung. I, however, noticed the figure 300 did not include bodies picked up by others, for which there was no count. It also noted that many bodies were too mutilated for relatives to identify. 92. Washington Post, (October 1976 (Simons, Bangkok), 9 October 1976 (Shibata and Ito, Bangkok), Le Monde, 9 October 1976 (de Beer, Bangkok). The most sensitive coverage of the coup was by Martin Woolcott in The Guardian, 17 October 1976. The most terrifying repercussion of the long-nurtured American image of an unilaterally aggressive DRV came eight days after the coup when senior US officials of the American Embassy in Bangkok, for nuclear weapons to forestall an alleged Vietnamese attack: symbolically a bold request for the ultimate in American technology in the breek to forestall the tide of social revolution enveloping the embassy in Bangkok. See Jeffrey Stein, "Thais Sought Nukes from the U.S.," FNS, Washington. 93. Examples of this reportage in Le Monde, 17 October 1976 (de Beer, Bangkok); San Jose Mercury, 19 October 1976 (UPI, Bangkok); New York Times, 3 November 1976 (AP, Bangkok); Washington Post, 27 October 1976 (I., Simons, Bangkok). 94. Indochina Resource Center, A Time to Heal: The Effects of
Samak immediately instituted personnel shifts, including the transfer into the ministry of Pol. General Sirisak, as a vice minister, and the elevation of Pol. Lt. General Monchai Phanakhonchee to be acting police director. Anonymous #1.

101. The date December 9 would be December 8 in the Western hemisphere. Samak’s conference reported in Bangkok Daily Thaï, 9 December 1976, 1, 3, 16. A day earlier Pacifica News Radio, Berkeley, quoted a Reuters dispatch saying Thai defense ministry officials claimed to have secret documents proving the DRV was going to invade Thailand within two months.

102. Thai Samakkhi (an opposition newspaper published in the United States in Thai language), January 1977, 4, cites Nan Dhan and other Vietnamese newspapers reacting to the wild charges of the interior minister.


---

**2ND ANNUAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE**

**SAN FRANCISCO**

**FRIDAY, APRIL 3, GLIDE MEMORIAL CHURCH**

**SATURDAY, APRIL 4, HILTON HOTEL**

---

**SATURDAY AFTERNOON, APRIL 4**

Hilton-Continental
Parlor 2, 1:30 P.M.

**CCAS COMMITTEE OF CONCERNED ASIAN SCHOLARS**

POSTWAR "DEVELOPMENT" IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: CONTRADICTIONS

Peter Bell, Yale University
John Despres, Stanford University
Warren Ickman, University of California, Berkeley
Laurence Mos, University of California, Berkeley
Boonsanong Punyodyana, Cornell University
Peter Schram, University of Illinois