

CHAPTER V

HO CHI MINH AND THAI-VIETNAMESE RELATIONS

1948-1969

When WWII ended, Soviet-West relations rapidly degenerated. As of 1946, the border line between communism and the “free world” became apparent. Tensions between the two power camps were growing over situations in East Europe, the Middle East, Greek and Turkey. American resistance to perceived Soviet aggression and expansionism led to the introduction of the Containment Doctrine¹ and Domino Theory². In Southeast Asia, Communism movements in Indonesia, Malaya and Indochina gradually built strongholds among the labor and became considerably influential political forces which threatened privileges and statuses of the colonial authorities³. Unsurprisingly, the British and the French began urging the American to act to “stop the communist threat” in the region. As a result, when the Chinese communists marked their victory over the nationalists by the formation of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the US announced its determination to deter communism.

It is worth noting that the DRV from late 1948 officially began leaning towards the socialist camp. In the wake of the French’s return, which was undoubtedly backed by Britain and the US, and unfavorable political developments in Thailand since the late 1947, the Viet Minh leaders saw the victory of the Chinese Communists over the Nationalists as an invaluable opportunity to access international assistance and diplomatic recognition. “Ho undoubtedly recognized that growing US support for the French could no longer be avoided and the closer ties with Moscow and Beijing

¹ The doctrine was originated in 1945-1946 and was adopted in the famous message of US President Harry Truman to the US Congress on 12 Mar 1947. Initially, the policy was meant to support anti-communist forces in Greece and Turkey but later it was expanded to justify support for any nation that the United States government believed was threatened by Communism.

² The fear of many anti-Communists within the United States was that Communism would triumph throughout the entire world and eventually be a direct threat to the government of the United States. This view led to the domino theory according to which a communist takeover in any nation could not be tolerated because it would lead to a chain reaction which would result in a triumph of world communism.

³ In the French’s perspective, if they lost Vietnam, they would lose North Africa and most of their empire as well (Hammer. 1960: 201).

represented the best chance for a Viet Minh victory in Indochina” (Duiker. 2000: 430). This causal belief led to the DRV’s open affiliation with the socialist camp. As a result, in January 1950, the PRC officially recognized the DRV, and it was soon followed by the Soviet Union.

The recognition of the DRV by China and the USSR, as Goscha (1999: 314) notes, marked the arrival of the Cold War in Southeast Asia. The Americans now considered “world communism” to be the greatest threat to the region, menacing the “free world” access to its rich economic resources and vital maritime lanes. As the New York Times commented, “Indochina is now one of the danger spots of the world, a crucial battlefield in the Cold War with the Communists. The Russian step in recognizing the rival leader, Ho Chi Minh, was exceptionally grave because it is the first time the Soviet Union has gone so far in violation of diplomatic procedure” (cited in the *Bangkok Post*, 11 February 1950).

With the onset of the Cold War in Southeast Asia, Thailand, given her geographical and strategic location, and not least the anti-Communist sentiment that the Thai ruling elite, i.e. the neo-traditional school, held, was seen by the US as a “bastion” to deter communism and extend US influence in the region (Pasuk and Baker. 2005: 146). In Washington strategists’ calculations, if Thailand’s “freedom and independence” could be preserved, “the heart and much of the body of Southeast Asia will have been saved” (Mungkandi, in Mungkandi and Warren. 1982: 91).

The context laid background for the interactions between Thailand and Vietnam and reinforced the beliefs of the governing group of each country, which helped increasingly distance one regime from the other in a sound zero-sum confrontation. In order to understand the Thai ruling elite’s perception of Ho Chi Minh and its impacts on the bilateral relations in the new context, this chapter will begin by exploring the rise of the military, which represented the neo-traditional school of thought. This school undoubtedly helped to dictate the Thai ruling elite’s perception of Ho Chi Minh and the DRV, which had significant impacts on Thailand’s Vietnam policy, including the policy on the Viet Kieu.

Like the previous chapter, this chapter will also assess the role of Ho Chi Minh and his thought in shaping the DRV’s Thailand policy. Accordingly, Hanoi’s perception of Thailand and the DRV’s Thailand policy in the new context will be investigated in light of Ho’s Marxist worldview as well as his principled and causal beliefs. This will

be followed by the examination of the role of the Ho Chi Minh factor in the Isan-based Vietnamese party's Viet Kieu policy.

5.1. A Ho Chi Minh Communist and Thailand's Vietnam policy

5.1.1. The military rule and their beliefs

In the immediate post-WWII context, the rise of the progressive Seri Thai posed acute threat to the status and privileges of the royalists, the aristocracy and the military. As the result, the traditional elites, who once joined the Seri Thai movement in opposition to the military rule under Phibun, now saw the need to cooperate with the military to oust Pridi from power. Ideologically, this reflected the competition between the progressive school of thought led by Pridi-Isan leaders and the traditional school represented by the Democrat party in alliance with the neo-traditional school embodied by the military.

According to Sorasak (2005: 490-491), the Democrat party, designated to struggle with Pridi's camp in the 1946 elections, was composed of three powerful conservative factions, i.e. the royalists, the aristocrats, and Khuang's group. In contrary to Pridi's parties, the Democrats supported capitalism and relatively conservative democracy whilst protecting the landed interests. "Most of the Democrat leaders held large tracts of land, enjoyed ties with royalty and hoped to restore the power and prestige of the monarchy".

After the 1946 elections which saw the dominance of Pridi's parties in the Assembly and in the government, the Democrat party directed a campaign against the progressives, particularly aiming at discrediting Pridi, and voiced their support for the return of the military. "The same people who had drafted the new constitution now abandoned it within a month. The Democrats started their campaign by saying that the senate election was a trick of the Promoters to remain in power and other accusations of unfairness, having forgotten that they themselves originated the idea of voting on a list" (Sorasak. 2005: 509).

Unsurprisingly, being the leader of the progressives, Pridi was the focus of the criticism from the Democrats. Among the accusations were republicanism, communism, and finally regicide. According to Sorasak, by 1947 the Democrats had become increasingly convinced that Pridi and the Isan leaders in power were threatening their foundations of interests and traditional ideology. "They saw the Pridi faction and the Isan leaders as communist agitators or at least deeply influenced by such elements"

(Sorasak. 2005: 517). According to Prince Suphasawat, Khuang refused the prince's suggestion to cooperate with Pridi in 1947, reasoning that "Pridi's desire for a Communist Republic in Siam would never change" (2005: 517).

At the same time, the conservatives turned their eyes to the same man who they had cooperated with the progressives to bring him down. In their calculations, the return of the military might help to protect the conservatives' privileges, especially their social status and access to land, from progressive policies of Pridi's camp. As a result, the military quickly capitalized on the causal belief to regain the position that they had attained under Phibun's first rule. On 19 March 1947, Phibun declared he had to return to public life to clear his name of charges of treason and war crimes – a move that was welcomed by the Democrats and pro-army figures (Sorasak. 2005).

The context provided the background for the 1947 coup. The coup makers claimed they had acted only to uphold military honor, to solve the King's assassination, and to rid the country of corruption and Communism (Sorasak. 2005: 529). As a result, the immediate post-coup period saw a temporary ascendancy of the conservatives. The coup leaders promulgated the provisional constitution of 1947 which further endowed the throne with the right to nominate members of the upper house. Beside the senate, the royalists pronouncedly took over the administration with Khuang at its head.

However, like in the Pridi's era, the leadership of the royalists and the aristocracy was soon be challenged by the military, who were of the neo traditional school of thought. After the military consolidated internal affairs and ensured international approval for the new regime following the 29 January 1948 election, the coup leaders demanded Khuang to step down in favor of Phibun. The new chapter of military rule and an era of the military-monarchy alliance began and continued up to the 1980s.

Ideologically, the post-Pridi's era witnessed the cooperation between the neo-traditional school represented by the military and the traditional school led by the royalists and the aristocracy in opposition to progressive forces in general and to Communism in particular. While the military had to capitalize on the monarchy's image to legitimize its leadership in a constitutional monarchy with the military as its defender and center of power, the royalists and the aristocracy undoubtedly preferred to cooperate with the generals to maintain their privileges and consolidated their status in dealing with the progressive forces. According to Pasuk and Baker (1999: 220), "Thailand's military dictators were the defenders of bureaucratic absolutism – a form of

rule by a mandarin-aristocracy, created under absolute kingship, embellished by colonial systems, and strengthened with modern American technology”.

As a result, the dominant ideas during the military rule were those of neo-traditional school. It is worth noting that basically the neo traditional and traditional school shared a common worldview, i.e. capitalism in the form of a constitutional monarchy system defined with the reinvented values of the monarchy, Buddhism, and the nation. They all advocated a quasi-democracy model – a top-down political system of paternalism. To them, any progressive forces who dared to challenge the privileges and status of the monarchy, the aristocracy and the military were the enemy of the institutions and Thai traditions. Unsurprisingly, these opposition forces were dubbed “Communism”. These beliefs were also notable in Thailand’s foreign policy which was described by Sarasin (1976: 3) as a reactive and simplistic way which reflected “basically the idiosyncrasies of the small ruling military oligarchy on world affairs as they reflected Thai national security and survival”.

In the context of the Cold War, the two schools also shared a set of causal beliefs. Firstly, they saw the need to ally with each other and reach compromises in sharing power and wealth in opposition to Communism – a reflection of capitalism-socialism conflict. Under the second Phibun’s rule, though being relatively restrained in the power circle by the military leader, the monarchy, nobles, and bureaucrats still maintained their root in the society and gradually strengthened their presence. With the ascendancy of Sarit, who held his beliefs on indigenous principles of authority, the monarch was restored to the apex of the moral, social, and political order (Wyatt. 1984: 281). This undoubtedly provided Sarit with support from the aristocracy and royalists.

Secondly, the ruling elite, which were of the capitalist class, were attracted to the development and power of the “Free World” led by the US and believed that by affiliating with the West, Thailand would be protected from Communism and given access to capital and technical assistance for development. During the 1950s, Phibun increasingly valued US support and saw the chance to use the repression against other enemies such as Pridi remnants and opponents in the local Chinese community in Thailand (Pasuk and Baker. 2005: 145). In the wake of the 1954 Geneva Conference, most Thai leaders were convinced that the dangers posed by Thailand’s abandoning neutrality were outweighed by the advantages of an American commitment to the defense of mainland Southeast Asia and also of an immense in American military and economic aid (Nuechterlein. 1965: 119).

Thirdly, from the anti-Communist camp's point of view, the Thai ruling elite believed in the Domino theory and the propagandized threat of Communist expansion in the region. According to Mungkandi (in Mungkandi and Warren. 1982: 91), to the Thais, "the domino theory was not needed to explain the gravity of the situation as the communist advance was already moving closer to its doorstep. Any further communist encroachments would be detrimental to the security of Thailand". In their view, northeastern Thailand would be the next step in the Communists' drive for domination of all Southeast Asia (Kirk. 1968: 8). As a result, the Thai military regime felt responsible for taking part in anti-Communist campaigns in Southeast Asia, especially in Indochina.

Particularly in the mainland, three factors that magnified the Thai governing elite's fear of Communism expansion were of Vo Nguyen Giap's Dien Bien Phu campaign, of political developments in Laos, and of the armed rising of the Thai Communists. In 1953, in order to prepare for the Dien Bien Phu campaign, several Viet Minh military divisions tactically moved in force in Laos and Cambodia to distract the French forces⁴. At this time the Viet Kieu in Thailand were encouraged to increasingly contribute to the campaign in terms of materials and manpower. This was interpreted by the West and the Thai government as "evidence of Viet Minh aggressive designs against Siam and all of Southeast Asia" (Hammer. 1966: 293)⁵. Until the late 1960s, the Thais still believed that Dien Bien Phu victory was the first step for the Vietnamese Communists to take over Indochina. "When the Viet Minh trounced the French at Dien Bien Phu, they did so not just to take over Vietnam but also Laos and Cambodia" (Theh Chongkhadikij, *Bangkok Post*, 14 September 1969).

In the wake of the 1954 Geneva Conference which, as Randolph (1986: 18) notes, was seen by the US as a "disaster" that "completed a major forward stride of communism which may lead to the loss of Southeast Asia"⁶, the Thai military regime, obsessively fearing Vietnamese expansion into Thailand and subversive activities

⁴ In Giap's words, "I never intended to remain in Laos. It was a feint designed to distract the French, and it worked" (cited in Karnow. 1994: 204).

⁵ The writer himself did not understand why the Viet Minh forces then suddenly retreated back to Vietnam. For this matter, it can be said that Gen Vo Nguyen Giap was successful in distracting the French and their allies from the Dien Bien Phu.

⁶ According to British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, Britain, France and the US had entered into a secret seven-point agreement to partition Vietnam for an indefinite period. Dulles, says Eden, only reluctantly agreed to partition, as he was determined to liberate the northern half of Vietnam from communist domination (Warbey. 1972: 102).

among the Vietnamese refugees and the Thai-Lao in the northeast, quickly responded to the proposal of the US on a Southeast Asia security treaty which led to the establishment of the SEATO⁷ to which the signatories were the US, Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines and Thailand. On grounds that Thailand was a “front station” in deterring Communism in the region, the Thai ruling elite was successful in having the SEATO headquarters and the SEATO Military Command established in Bangkok.

Also political developments in Laos which saw the rising of the Pathet Lao supported by North Vietnam concerned the Thais and their American ally. It is worth noting that after the 1954 Geneva conference, the US began to play an active role in Laos. According to Corrine (1973: 31), when conflicts between the different factions in Laos began, the US prepared to make Laos a “bulwark against Communism” and supported the right wing with increasing economic and military aid. Sharing similar views, the Thai military regime believed that Laos could serve as an obvious route for communist infiltration in Thailand. Besides the security interest, the Thai government, as Corrine notes (1973: 30), had “fraternal feelings” for the Lao people. This principled belief was undoubtedly influenced by Sarit, whose mother was of Lao family and whose Laotian cousin, Phoumi Nosavan, was the leader of the right-wing faction in Laos. In Sarit’s view, “everything that happens in the kingdom of Laos cannot help but affect Thailand” (Corrine. 1973: 30). Consequently, after the Geneva Conference on Laos, Bangkok permitted the stationing of American marines on Thai soil and concluded a bilateral agreement with the US, known as the Thanat-Rusk Communiqué, which confirmed the US prerogative to come to Thailand’s aid in any case of an emergency without having to wait for the other SEATO members to respond (Sarasin. 1976: 12).

Another factor that made the military regime concerned about “Communism expansion” was of the armed struggle staged by the Communists in Thailand, especially in Isan. It is worth noting that before Sarit imposed an absolute military rule, the post-Pridi’s Isan leaders, despite suppression and continuous attack in newspapers and

⁷ The US National Security Council Policy Statement released on August 20, 1954 (NSC 5429/2) decided to “negotiate a Southeast Asia security treaty with the UK, Australia, New Zealand, France, the Philippines, Thailand and, as appropriate, other free South and Southeast Asian countries willing to participate” so as to “commit each member to treat an armed attack on the agreed area (including Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam) as dangerous to its own peace, safety and vital interests, and to act promptly to meet the common danger in accordance with its own constitutional processes”. Direct US military intervention was to be considered “if requested by a legitimate local government which requires assistance to defeat local communist subversion or rebellion not constituting armed attack” (Randolph. 1986: 19).

rumors in which they were alleged to be leftists, republicans, separatists and communists, still kept their political bases in the elections. According to Sorasak (2005: 572), despite the military's suppression, Tiang and his followers, most of them were "socialist reformist rather than communist politicians", insisted on parliamentary means to achieve their socialist goals. After Tiang's assassination in 1952 by General Phao Sriyanond's police, "the interests and ideas the Isan leaders represented and their role remained unchanged, but less powerful than they had been" (Sorasak. 2005: 572). They gathered together in a socialist front to take part in the 1957 elections which saw the creation of a parliament "with many leftists which Sarit found difficult to control, even with generous use of bribes" (Pasuk and Baker. 2005: 148).

As a result, backed by the US, Sarit staged a second coup on 20 October 1958, declaring martial law, annulling parliament, discarding the constitution, and banning political parties. This was followed by brutal suppression of the progressives. "Between 1958 and 1962 the government arrested 1080 alleged communist agents and supporters. In 1961 government forces raided several towns and villages in Isan, and arrested hundreds of alleged communist agents and supporters. They were imprisoned without trial for many years" (Somchai, in Ungpakorn. 2003: 59). In 1966, the government forces "tortured suspects, raped women, and carried out summary executions of supposed communists" in various villages in Isan (Pasuk and Baker. 1995: 161).

The military regime's policy helped to drive progressive Isan leaders and their supporters to the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). As Somchai notes (in Unpakorn. 2003: 159), since non-violent resistance to state repression was impossible, the only political channel through which the Isan leaders could express their regional grievances was the armed uprising of the Communist Party. In 1961, the CPT founded the Democratic Patriotic Front to organize peasants for armed struggle. However, it was not until August 1965 that the insurgency began. It is important to note that since 1964, the Thai government had increasingly got involved in the US's Vietnam war policy. To help the US to prepare for its direct involvement in Vietnam which was marked by the Tonkin incident⁸, in 1964 the Thai government under the "contingency plan" granted to

⁸ To persuade the US Congress to approve the policy in South Vietnam which opened the way for the direct involvement of US troops in the war, the administration directed the so-called "Tonkin incident". On the 4 August 1964, the White House announced that two days earlier the US destroyers *Maddox* and *Turner Joy* had been attacked with torpedoes by North Vietnamese patrol boats while on routine patrol duties in the Gulf of Tonkin outside North Vietnamese waters and called for "retaliatory

the US the use of its six air bases in northeastern Thailand and a large naval airbase at Sattahip. Ideologically, this move together with the intensive war in Vietnam probably convinced the CPT of its legitimacy to liberate Thailand from “US dominion”. As a result, on 18 November 1965, the CPT announced the establishment of the “Anti-American Movement in Thailand”, apparently as its “first people’s armed unit” (The Thai Government White Paper. 1972). In this respect, while the Thai military regime pictured the CPT as an acute Communist threat, during the 1960s Hanoi leaders saw the CPT as “the only force capable of leading the revolution” (Porter. 1983: 12) against imperialism in Thailand.

To conclude, in the Cold War context, the Thai ruling elite based their beliefs on Western orientation in terms of politics and economy, on traditional values in terms of culture, and hence anti-Communism. However, while the Thai government saw anti-Communist policy was critical to security in Laos, Cambodia and Isan, Ho Chi Minh’s DRV supported the Pathet Lao and the CPT. This laid the background for the Thai ruling elite’s perception of Ho Chi Minh and for the Thai-Vietnamese confrontation.

5.1.2. The Thai ruling elite’s perception of Ho Chi Minh and Thai-Vietnamese confrontation

Since the Thai ruling elite decided to align with the “Free World” and adopted Western worldview, it is necessary to review the West perception of Ho before determining that held by the Thai military regime. Being the president of the DRV, given his role in shaping the DRV’s foreign policy as well as his international experience, Ho Chi Minh had his name attached to the DRV to the extent that except Ho Chi Minh and the Dien Bien Phu military hero, Vo Nguyen Giap, “other leading figures of the Hanoi regime were almost totally unknown not only to the American public but also to US government officials and intelligence analysts” (Duiker. 1995). During the Cold War, Ho Chi Minh was pictured by the West as a dangerous international communist and domestic totalitarian leader who was responsible for “the death of millions of his compatriots”.

As soon as the birth of the DRV, the British and the French were concerned about an independent Vietnam under the Comintern veteran Nguyen Ai Quoc, which could pose an acute threat to their empires. According to Warbey (1972: 11), for the British Foreign Office and the British Labor Government, Vietnam consisted of “those

measures”. As Warbey points out (1972: 171), Prime Minister Harold Wilson of Britain and the rest of the world now know that the incident was faked for political purposes.

parts of French Indochina known as Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina”, and Ho Chi Minh was a “Comintern agitator, known under various aliases and probably of Chinese origin”. In Southeast Asia, recognizing the sympathy the Thais held towards the Viet Minh in the immediate post-WWII period, the British and the French provided the Thais with intelligence files showing that Ho Chi Minh of the DRV was Nguyen Ai Quoc, “the man who had worked with the CCP [Chinese Communist Party] in 1930 to form the Siamese Communist Party in opposition to both Phibun and Pridi” (Goscha. 1999: 317).

In the eye of the leader of the “Free World”, the pronounced Viet Minh’s shift toward the Chinese communists confirmed the views of American Europeanists who saw Ho as a surrogate for the forces of international communism and “a tool of Stalin and Mao Zedong” (Warbey. 1972: 80). In the wake of the Soviet Union’s recognition of the DRV on 30 January 1950, the US Secretary of State Dean Acheson stated that Russian recognition should remove “any illusions as to the ‘nationalist’ nature of Ho Chi Minh’s aims and [it] reveals Ho in his true colors as the mortal enemy of native independence in Indochina” (Hammer. 1968: 250-251). Also the US public perception of Ho and his regime shifted as a result of anti-Communist propaganda, i.e. from seeing the Viet Minh as a broad patriotic movement, the image that was relatively successfully built by Ho in the immediate post-WWII period, to perceiving Ho and his colleagues as committed agents of international communism (Duiker. 2000: 469). According to Duiker (1995), “for every young American who marched against the war, perhaps ten others went off to war in the firm belief that they were saving the world from communism. For them and for millions of their compatriots, Ho Chi Minh was a totalitarian leader”.

From the perception, Ho’s tireless efforts to fight for national independence and unification were seen by the “Free World” to a large extent as the plot of Communist expansion under the direction of Moscow and Beijing and the cause of the brutal war and of the death of millions of Vietnamese people. This picture was further painted in the wake of the “mistakes and shortcomings” of the implementation of the land reform⁹.

⁹ Ho’s ideas on people’s power were once challenged by radical cadres who wanted to push for the adoption of harsher policies and measures directed at punishing class enemies and laying the groundwork for a quick advance to a fully socialist society, particularly the land reform program. Under pressures from Moscow and especially Beijing, though Ho was personally “in no hurry” to carry out the program, he agreed to support it as a tactical measure to please Beijing and possibly to placate radical colleagues (Duiker. 2000: 475). Directed by hot headed cadres, the land reform became extreme. “Before

In the wake of Ho's death, the *Vietnam Digest* (December 1969: 9-11) commented that "Nguyen Tat Thanh becomes for decades an agent of a political regime responsible for the deaths of 20 million people, most of them peasants". Using the same tone, T.D. Allman (*Bangkok Post*, 10 February 1969) remarked "Ho Chi Minh was not a Great Man...The man wrote bad poetry chain-smoked trusted the wrong people, was particularly responsible for the death of about half a million of his countrymen...His mistakes cannot be corrected, his social goals have been sacrificed to the dictate of war, and his country will continue to be subjected to the most thorough destruction Asia has ever seen". Sharing the same view, Mar Lerner (*Bangkok Post*, 10 September 1969) noted Ho was "an affectionate 'Uncle' of his people but also an authoritarian revolutionary who carried on an unremitting war for a communist regime in Vietnam for almost a quarter of a century, with millions of casualties for his people".

A Ho Chi Minh Communist and Thailand-Vietnam confrontation

"The refugees wanted to mourn the death of their leader openly – to the extent of holding parades in the streets – but the local Thais found this offensive. *Ho Chi Minh, to the Thais, is a 'bad' figure. And any expression of sorrow over his death in the streets of a Thai city is unbearable*" (Suthichai, in the *Bangkok Post*, 4 October 1970)¹⁰.

Similar to the "Free World's perception" of Ho Chi Minh, the Thai military regime now saw the DRV and Ho Chi Minh as a part of the communist world which could pose an acute threat to the Thai national security and the regional peace in two main aspects. Firstly, Ho Chi Minh's unwavering goal of national independence and unification was seen as an act of imposing communist rule in not only Vietnam but Indochina, northeastern Thailand and ultimately Southeast Asia. According to Nuechterlein (1965: 119), the security of Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam figured prominently in the thinking of Thai officials because they feared that any Communist threat to Thailand would come from this area. Moreover, since the mid 1960s the Thais believed that the growing Communist terrorist activities in the northern and northeastern and southern regions were attributed to the intensified Communist insurgency in South Vietnam (Smith et al. 1968: 246). Unsurprisingly, like their American ally who considered Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam the three "dominoes" under most immediate threat (Stuart-Fox. 1997), the Thai military regime saw South Vietnam as the

the campaign ended in late 1956, several thousand people would be executed and countless other would be harassed, persecuted, and humiliated by being labeled with the indelible stigma of 'class enemy' of the people (Duiker. 2000: 479).

¹⁰ Italicized by the researcher

key factor to the security of not only Laos, Cambodia but also Thailand. In an interview to the *Foreign Affairs Bulletin* (October-November 1974), the Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman pointed out that “The key area is South Vietnam...If the battle in South Vietnam is lost, Laos will fall by itself...So is the case with Cambodia”. In his view, “The South Vietnamese should recognize that their country is in danger. Their country is fighting a war against those who want to dominate them and enslave them”.

As a result, the Thai military regime provided the US whatever the latter needed to “protect” South Vietnam and Laos. From 1965 onward, Thailand was to serve as a principal base for American reconnaissance as well as tactical and strategic air missions over Indochina with seven air bases set up in Udon Thani, Nakhon Phanom, Ubon Ratchathani, Khorat, U-Tapao, Don Muong, and Takhli. Bangkok also lent its approval to the establishment of extensive communications and intelligence facilities throughout its eastern and northern provinces (Randolph. 1986: 58-60). By the end of 1967, 40,000 Americans were stationed in Thailand (Corrine. 1973: 39). From 1966, Thailand had been providing combat troops to “assist” in the Vietnam War¹¹. Unquestionably, Thailand’s moves were aimed at attaining more economic and military aid from the US. However, the policy was also influenced by the causal beliefs of the Thai ruling elite. According to Randolph (1986: 57), far more important in the Thai calculation was the preeminent expectation that “the US would stay the course in Vietnam and Southeast Asia, and thereby demonstrate its ability and willingness to remain as the primary guarantor of Thai security”.

In this respect, the Thais believed that it was Ho Chi Minh, given his popularity among the Vietnamese, who was the inspiration for the guerilla fighting in South Vietnam and whose policy posed a threat to the region. In the wake of Ho’s death, Kukrit Pramoj’s *Siam Rath*, the voice of the royalists¹², commented that “it was Ho who had given directive for aggression against South Vietnam and other neighbors. If he had changed his directive otherwise, things would be greatly different from what they are now in South Vietnam, or Cambodia, Laos and Thailand” (cited in *Bangkok World*, 8 September 1969).

¹¹ The first Thai military force called “The Queen’s Cobra Regiment” was sent to Saigon in 1966. In October, the Thai government announced it was willing to increase the size of its forces to 12,000 men if the US would provide the training and equipment (Corrine. 1973: 39)

¹² As McCargo points out (2002: 12), *Siam Rath* was essentially conservative and pro-royalist. According to Pasuk and Baker (in Pridi. 2000), the newspaper was used by the royalists to seriously attack and discredit Pridi from the 1950s up to 1970s.

In the Thais' calculation, without Ho, the new Vietnamese administration would have to change their policy towards South Vietnam since the momentum to rally South Vietnamese to the Viet Cong (Vietnamese Communists in the South) would be lost. After Ho passed away, the Thais expected that Ho's death would bring "positive prospect" to the South Vietnam regime. As the *Bangkok News* puts it, "Ho's death might affect North Vietnam's political stability...It has been generally anticipated that the new North Vietnam administration might tone down its attitudes towards the problem of South Vietnam (cited in *Bangkok World*, 8 September 1969). "In coming months, in the absence of Ho, the new Hanoi rulers will have more trouble in whipping up revolutionary fever among the population in the South opposed to the Nguyen Van Thieu government" (*Bangkok World*, 8 September 1969). This raised hope among the Thai officials that Ho's death would affect US-Thai talks concerning the presence of the US troops in Thailand (*Bangkok World*, 5 September 1969). After a meeting with US Ambassador Leonard Unger to discuss the new development following Ho's death, Thanat announced that "the majority of American forces stationed in Thailand will remain here as long as they are needed to defeat communist aggression in South Vietnam and Laos" (*Bangkok Post*, 11 September 1969).

Secondly, given that Ho occupied a sacred position in the mind and heart of the Viet Kieu in Thailand, the reverence the Viet Kieu, the "fifth column" as the Thai elite and the press dubbed the refugees, held for him was seen as a potential Communist threat to the Thai national security. The common causal belief shared among the Thai ruling elite was that since Ho Chi Minh was an international Communist, and the Viet Kieu worshipped Ho, so they were Communists or at least were influenced by Communist ideology and possibly "did whatever Ho wanted them to do"¹³. The Thai government's 1967 document on Communist aggression in Thailand concluded that "The refugees' ideological orientation toward Communism and personal loyalty to Ho Chi Minh pose complex and difficult problems to the Royal Thai Government". The government paper titled "The Communist Threat to Thailand" published in the same year also confirmed "Communist subversion in the North-East has to some extent been

¹³ According to Theh Chongkhadikij (Post City, March 1962), concerning the reverence the Viet Kieu held for Ho, there were two reactions among Northeast officials. One was that "The Vietnamese refugees are not communists, though they believe in Ho". The other was "the Vietnamese are communists because they believe in Ho". The latter had this reason to support their view: "Ho is the most important Communist leader in Southeast Asia. People who believe in him will follow him and do what he wants them to do".

facilitated by the presence of some 30,000-40,000 Vietnamese refugees, most of whom are Hanoi-oriented and whose home frequently display portraits of Ho Chi Minh". Reinforcing the belief was the 1967 report released by the 7th PSYOP Group which stated that "Another factor that complicates the Northeast for the Thai government is the presence of about 40,000 Vietnamese refugees...A portrait of Ho...is frequently to be seen on the walls of Vietnamese homes in the Northeast...The refugees have always been under strong ideological influence from Hanoi". As the *Far Eastern Economic Review* (April 1970) commented, "To some in this militantly anti-communist kingdom, the prospects of thousands of rural homes prominently displaying pictures and mementoes of the late Ho Chi Minh would seem an outrageous menace worthy of quick and decisive reaction. To others, including the government, it is not simply a prospect but a reality and until recently there has been little if anything that could be done about it".

As a result, the Viet Kieu, as Flood observes (1977: 31-38), had long been viewed as virtual "saboteurs", frontline agents of revolution that would otherwise be alien to "happy Thailand". The Thai authorities also launched "a hate campaign" against the refugees, picturing them as "spies", "terrorists", and dangerous "communists". "These [Vietnamese] communities were hotbeds of communist subversion and northeast separatist conspiracies aimed at lopping off the northeast from Thailand". This view was boosted by the Thai writings which also "indulged in such well-worn racist themes as 'natural ethnic antipathy', 'clannishness', 'commercial dominance conspiracies', 'political subversion' and the like" (Flood. 1977: 38). Unsurprisingly, the Viet Kieu's paying respect for Ho Chi Minh in the wake of his death was seen as the cause for "more intensive conflict between the local Thais and the Vietnamese" (*Bangkok Post*, 4 October 1970). In the Thai reporter Suthichai Yoon's view, "When North Vietnamese President Ho died last year, the conflict between local Thais and the North Vietnamese reached an unprecedented climax...Ho Chi Minh, to the Thais, is a 'bad' figure. And any expression of sorrow over his death in the streets of a Thai city is unbearable" (*Bangkok Post*, 4 October 1970).

Though the Thai ruling elite were concerned about a Ho Chi Minh communist, which was undoubtedly the overriding theme in the Cold War context, there were signs to show that they still respected him as a patriotic leader of the Vietnamese people. As the Viet Kieu recalled, Thai provincial officials usually explained to the Vietnamese that they understood the Viet Kieu only carried out patriotic activities and the

government suppression measures imposed on the refugees were due to pressures from the US. The day the Viet Kieu in Udon Thani organized mourning ceremony to pay tribute to Ho, the then Army Commander of the Northeast region attended the ceremony to show respect for Ho and sympathy for the refugees. He said to the Vietnamese representative Phan Van Tuong, “You invited local officials; no one dared to come but me. See if anyone can do anything to me”¹⁴.

Moreover, in the wake of Ho Chi Minh’s death, besides anti-Communist articles, mostly written by Western writers, which pictured Ho as a totalitarian leader who was held responsible for the destructive war and lives of his compatriots and whose policy posed a threat to the stability and order of the region, the Thai press, particularly the *Bangkok Post* and the *Bangkok World*, was still free to publish writings which tended to be in favor of Ho Chi Minh. The *Bangkok Post* on 5 September 1969 published an article by John Roderick who argued that “Ho’s lifestyle contrasted sharply with that of Asia’s other famed communist – the 75 year-old Mao” and “Many Frenchmen were won over by his personal magnetism and apparent devotion to his country”.

On 7 September 1969, the newspaper spent two pages on the Ho Chi Minh topic with the title “Enigmatic People Pleaser”. The first page (page 13) depicted Ho’s picture with his right hand waving together with the US Liberty Goddess on a warfare background. The article said, “Whatever Ho was, or whatever he may have intended, his impact on the history of Asia is an era of revolution was undeniable... Ho was the man whose stubborn struggle shattered France’s colonial empire in Southeast Asia. He accomplished it almost single-handed, and it was an event which, in fact, contributed much to the dissolution of French colonialism in Africa too...Ho was the man who apparently was willing to risk defying the might of the US, whose huge bombers rained destruction on his country in a battle to thwart the avowed aims of international Communism in Asia”.

Likewise, the 13 September 1969 publication of the *Bangkok World* introduced Dennis Bloodworth’s work which sounded an admirable tone about Ho. “Catholics in his tastes, he had studied the Fabians, had read Proudhon, admired Lincoln and Jefferson – the inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness were

¹⁴ According to interviews with two ethnic Thai Vietnamese who were used to be representatives of the Vietnamese communities in Udon, conducted in Udon Thani on 6 November 2007. However, they do not remember the name of the Thai general.

written into the constitution of North Vietnam". Fifteen days later, on 28 September the newspaper published Mark Frankland's writing which confirmed the patriotic feature of Ho. "There was no-one in the South who could dispute Ho's reputation as the greatest Vietnamese patriot".

Though the publications can be seen as representing a relatively independent status of the Thai press vis-à-vis the military government, in light of the Cold War context and anti-Vietnamese sentiments among the Thai elite, and not least the traditional characteristic of Thai journalism as "a partisan press" (McCargo. 2002: 11)¹⁵, the fact that these writings were published without government censorship suggested that at least the ruling elite did not oppose to these views. It is noteworthy that this was not the case in South Vietnam, an important ally of the Thai military regime. Following the announcement of Ho's death on 3 September, the Vietnam Guardian published a small photograph of Ho on its front page along with news story on 5 September. Saigon governmental authorities immediately reprimanded the Guardian for publishing the picture, demanding that "photographs of communist leaders should not be published and that communist sources of information are to be exploited" (*Bangkok World*, 12 September 1969).

The Ho Chi Minh factor in Thailand policy

Generally, the change of the Thai government's perception of Ho Chi Minh was reflected in three respects. First was of the downplaying of Ho's DRV and recognition of the Bao Dai government. Second was of the anti-communist propaganda aimed at discrediting Ho among the Vietnamese. And last but not least was of the ban on Ho's image as well as suppression of community activities explicitly associated with Ho and the DRV.

The first move to mark the change in the Thai ruling elite's perception of Ho Chi Minh and the DRV was initiated by Phibun's second administration. Brought back to power in the wake of the 1947 coup, Phibun soon realized the anti-communist context could help him consolidate his position. Externally, by promoting anti-communist

¹⁵ According to McCargo (2002: 10-12), the Thai press was partisan to the core, each publication was dedicated to cheering its friends and discrediting its enemies. During Sarit's era, the press entered a period of severe restriction and control. Licenses for newspapers could be withdrawn for publishing "statements of a certain character", which included pro-communist statements, statements which offended the King and statement which discredit the government. Under the Thanom regime, the press could enjoy a bit more independence but "continued to be characterized by sex and sensationalism at the expense of political issues", and were "considered among the least serious in Asia".

policies, he could undoubtedly receive support from the US, which emerged as the greatest economic power in the world after WWII, and recognition from European powers such as Britain and France, two permanent members of the UN Security Council, given that they had been undoubtedly unhappy with Phibun's decision to side with the Japanese in WWII.

Internally, anti-communist agendas could help Phibun legally and officially marginalize Pridi's faction from the political arena and not least to lend legitimacy to the military government with the support from the royalists. It is worth recalling that during the second Phibun's rule, Ho's image was utilized to crush Pridi's partisans. As in the case of Tiang Sirikhan, who was the Minister of the Interior in the Khuang's Cabinet from January to February 1946, and Deputy Minister of the Interior in the Pridi's cabinet from March to August 1946, and who actively provided significant support to the Viet Minh, he was charged with being a "communist" by the police who produced a doctored photograph showing Tiang in the company of Ho Chi Minh. He was then strangled by Phao's police (Baker and Pasuk. 1995: 270).

From these beliefs, Phibun and the military elite were instrumental in Bangkok's recognition of the French sponsored Associated State of Vietnam on grounds that Ho, and thus the DRV, was of the communist camp.

Facing strong resistance from nationalist movements in Indochina, especially the increasing maturity and popularity of the DRV in Vietnam, the French forged a plan to create a viable Vietnamese state, hoping that it could help to destroy the Viet Minh militarily and politically, and not least to lure the US into providing military and economic assistance in the war against the DRV. Since the late 1940s, the French had launched a diplomatic offensive aimed at getting their Indochinese states recognized officially by the international community. This move was by and large backed by France's European allies, notably Britain. As for the US, Beijing's decision in mid-January to grant diplomatic recognition to the DRV, followed two weeks later by Moscow, had a dramatic impact on Washington. In February, the White House decided to grant diplomatic recognition to the Bao Dai government, followed by Great Britain and a number of other nations. Shortly thereafter, Washington approved an appeal from Paris for military assistance in the fight against the "red tide" in Asia.

In early January 1950, President Truman sent Phillip C. Jessup to survey the situation in Asia in general and in Indochina in particular. During his trip in Bangkok, Phillip had discussions with Phibun and other Thai leaders, urging Thailand to

recognize the Bao Dai government. In February this year, amidst hot debates among the Thai elite as to whether Thailand should recognize the Associated State of Vietnam, US Ambassador Edwin F. Stanton met Thai Foreign Minister Pot Sarasin to inform him the latter of Truman's policy on helping any country to deter communism as well as on the US intention to extend financial assistance to Thailand. On March 10, US President Truman approved in principle a grant of USD30 million in military assistance to Indochina, of which Thailand would receive USD10 million (Mungkandi, in Mungkandi and Warren. 1982: 87).

The Ho Chi Minh factor in Bangkok's recognition of the Bao Dai's government

The pressure from the US, the benefit from affiliating with the "Free World" politically, economically and militarily, the need to cope with the threat from progressive forces, especially Pridi's remnants and the CPT, laid the groundwork for the Phibun administration's decision to side with the West and to set up diplomatic relationship with the Bao Dai government.

However, various Thai statesmen opposed Phibun's move to recognize Bao Dai, reasoning that Ho's DRV was the real representative of the Vietnamese. Leading the opposition, as Goscha points out (1999: 316), was Khuang Aphaivong – the head of the Democratic Party and representative of the royalist voice. Ideologically, this can be seen as a result of divergence in terms of the causal beliefs between the military and the royalists. Unsurprisingly, the former, which was in power, saw successful alignment with the West as an opportunity to consolidate the military regime's legitimacy as well as to access to military and economic assistance from the US, which they believed could help to protect Thailand from communism. As a rationale for the recognition of the Bao Dai state, Phibun stressed Thailand's close economic and political relations with the US and Britain. He also believed that the US and Britain had recognized the Bao Dai regime was equal to building a protection shield for Thailand. Bangkok, therefore, should take the US's and Britain's proposal as an opportunity to immediately recognize Bao Dai (*Kiettisat*, 22 February 1950, cited in Thananan. 2002).

Meanwhile, stripped of the leadership role by the military, though the royalists definitely preferred a Western model rather than a socialist one as promoted by the progressives, they tended to see territorial conflicts with French Indochina as temporarily overriding concern. In Democrat MP Kukrit Pramoj's view, it had better

not recognize the Bao Dai government because it was not an independent regime but only a state in the French Union. "For this account, Thailand's recognition of the Vietnam state means the kingdom becomes a collaborator of France, thus, no different from a colony of France" (*Nakhonsan*, 18 February 1950, cited in Thananan. 2002).

Moreover, the royalists' opposition to Phibun's call for the recognition of the Bao Dai government can be seen as reaction to the military dictatorship. It is worth recalling that soon after the coup, in January 1948, M.R. Seni Pramoj, then Minister of Justice, publicly appealed to Phibun to step down as head of the army (Sorasak. 2005: 547). Concerning the recognition of the Associated State of Vietnam, Thai Foreign Minister Pot Sarasin was opposed to Phibun's proposal on grounds that Thailand was an independent country, if Thailand recognized the Bao Dai government, it would mean Thailand followed the US and Britain. It is possible that the royalist minister wanted to remind the premier of his previous decision to side with the Japanese during WWII. Accordingly, Phibun's Japanese policy was recalled during the Thai cabinet's discussions on the premier's stance on the Bao Dai issue (Thananan. 2002).

As a result, within two weeks Phibun had to convene three cabinet meetings, on 13th, 20th and then 27th February 1950, in which hot debates took place among the Thai leaders as to whether the Thai government should recognize Bao Dai's Associated State or accept Ho Chi Minh's DRV. One of the main issues debated among ministers and representatives of the three armed forces was of whether Ho Chi Minh was a communist or a nationalist¹⁶. By and large, participants were divided into two groups. One group, mostly comprising of military officers led by Phibun, suggested that given the threat of communism to Thailand, and not least the support of communist governments, i.e. the PRC and the Soviet Union, to Ho Chi Minh and the DRV, the Thai should side with the US and the Great Britain in recognizing the Bao Dai government. The other, led by the then Foreign Minister Pot Sarasin, Minister of Health Borirak Vesakan, Minister of Justice Phramanuphanvimolsatrath and Minister of Transportation Lt-General Phrayathephatsadin, argued that the Associated State of Vietnam was no more than a "puppet" without mass support and could be removed at any time. Moreover, if Thailand recognized the Bao Dai government, this meant Thailand was dependent on super powers (Thananan. 2002).

¹⁶ According to a doctorate thesis proposal of Thananan Boonwanna, titled "Vietnam-Thailand Relations from 1946 to 1976" in Vietnamese. The proposal was approved by the Thesis Committee, University for Social Sciences and Humanities, National University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

It is worth noting that around a month earlier, Ho had sent a letter to the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs, affirming that the DRV was “the only legal government” and asking non-communist regional leaders to establish diplomatic relations with his government on grounds that the DRV respected the notions of equality and freedom (Goscha. 1999: 320). This more or less had an impact on Pot Sarasin. After Phibun officially announced the decision of Thailand’s diplomatic recognition of the Associated State of Vietnam as well as of Laos and Cambodia on 28 February 1950, the Foreign Minister announced his resignation.

Unsurprisingly, the military had been well prepared for the issue to be approved. Three days after the first cabinet meeting, referring to communism as “the most dangerous enemies we have ever had”, Phibun remarked that “There is no doubt the Communists will push as far South as they can. We will fight the best we can on our borders” (*Bangkok Post*, 16 February 1950). On the same day, the *Bangkok Post* published Jonathan Blow’s analysis concluding that “If Bao falls Siam will fall also. And if Siam falls, the already hard pressed government of Burma will not last long. The ‘rice bowl’ would be lost and the Red tide would lap the very frontiers of India and Malaya”. Two days after the second cabinet meeting, another article by Charles A. Grumich appeared on the *Bangkok Post* informing that the French Surete Nationale and agents of the Army’s “Second Bureau” had big files on Ho Chi Minh; and the British and Chinese also “had him tabbed for years as a Communist” (*Bangkok Post*, 22 February 1950).

The day that the Thais officially recognized Bao Dai’s regime, Radio Bangkok broadcast a statement urging the people resolutely to resist Communist infiltration (*Bangkok Post*, 1 March 1950). Also the Thai authorities started drafting an emergency legislation to make illegal any dissemination of pro-Communist information as well as certain other communist activities (*Bangkok Post*, 2 March 1950). Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education had instructed all provincial teachers to explain to their students the dangers of Communism and how it might destroy Thailand’s independence (*Bangkok Post*, 4 March 1950).

Following the recognition of the Bao Dai government, in November 1950 the Thai authorities officially closed the Viet Kieu Assistance Association. In 1951, under US pressures, the Thai government expelled representatives of the DRV as well as the VNS from Thailand while agreeing to open the “second” Vietnam’s delegation in Bangkok. Adopting the same approach, from the late 1950s to the mid 1970s the Thai

government established diplomatic relationship with the government of South Vietnam patronized by the US.

Ho Chi Minh's image in anti-Communist propaganda

From the late 1950s on, the Thai government, under the US pressure and their obsessed beliefs of Communist expansion, adopted harsh policies against Communism. In 1952, the anti-Communist law was reactivated in which Communism was described as any act designed to overthrow the government headed by the King, any attempt to nationalize property, and any act which created instability and disunity (Pasuk and Baker. 1995: 295). After Phibun was brought down, amidst the escalation of the Cold War and the Vietnam War, anti-Communist policies were intensified during 1957-1968 under the "military absolute rule" (Chai-anan and Suchit, in Hajiahmad and Crouch. 1985: 86)¹⁷. With assistance from the US, the army conducted intensive policing and propaganda work in villages in the CPT base areas, especially with the Village Security Program launched in January 1967 (Pasuk and Baker.1995: 295). In 1969, the revised law defined communism to include persuading others to lose faith in religion or engaging in activities that would destroy Thai customs (Pasuk and Baker. 1995: 285).

This background gave momentum to anti-communist propaganda which saw the involvement of the military, the Sangha, and the press. According to George (1974: 77), in December 1965 the Communist Suppression Operations Command (CSOC) set up the Psychological Operations (Psy Ops) Division. Also a joint civilian-police-military headquarters (CPM-1) was established, first at Mukdahan and later at Sakol Nakhon. In October 1967, the Thai army took over CSOC operations for the Northeast. In 1969, the National Information Psychological Operations Organization (NIPSO) was set up to provide overall guidance in the Psy Ops field. As a result, a National Psy Ops Center was created to do the actual work and support the NIPSO.

In Bangkok strategists' views, the Northeast, the "serious red area", was both ethnically and linguistically far closer to the Lao than it was to the Thai majority; and there were only two traditional institutions, i.e. the monarchy and Buddhism, that tie these people to Thai society (Somboon. 1973: 78). As a result, Buddhist monks were mobilized in anti-Communist propaganda. As early as March 1950, the Phibun

17

Staging a coup to oust Phibun in 1957, Sarit introduced absolute rule during 1958-1959. From 1959 he ruled under an interim constitution in which he was granted vast discretionary powers to solve social, economic and national security problems. He was succeeded by General Thanom who ruled under a semi-parliamentary system in which the executive was independent of the legislature.

government charged the Communists with conducting a subversive campaign to create dissention among the monks. As of 1951, Buddhist monks helped in distributing leaflets and posters throughout the country. "The poster demonstrated a fierce demon representing a communist destroying the wat and places for worship, cruelly torturing the monks, associated with propaganda words 'if communist comes, wat and monks will be destroyed' were seen and distributed every where" (Somboon. 1973: 96).

Under Sarit, Buddhism, especially the royal Thammayut sect, became more closely associated with the government. The government controlled the monetary rewards for the administrative monks of all levels. Monks were instructed not only to preach Buddhism, but also organize villages in development projects, explain about laws, and discourage Communism (Pasuk and Baker. 2005: 149, 184). According to Somboon (1973: 156), the Sangha found its practical justification for the need to "adapt its roles to the changing society" to "modify its role to catch up with the changing milieu" and to "check and ward off an alien 'ism' (communism)". As a result, anti-Communist Buddhists pictured Communism as "practices against Buddhist ethics... The Communist subversions are against human right and human dignity" (Bhavilai. 1967).

Regarding Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Kieu, by and large the press and publication in Thailand propagated a "horrible" image of "communists" and a "communism menace" spreading from Vietnam to Thailand (Lai. 2001: 66). In 1951, the Ministry of the Interior launched a campaign to inform the Vietnamese population that the Thai government had now recognized Bao Dai's government and that Ho Chi Minh was to be considered a "Communist" (Goscha. 1999: 324). This was magnified by the press with writings describing Ho Chi Minh as a dangerous Communist or a totalitarian leader who was held responsible for the war and the lives of Vietnamese people and whose policy posed a threat to the regional security and order. As a Thai writer commented, "Ho Chi Minh, to the Thais, is a 'bad' figure. And any expression of sorrow over his death in the streets of a Thai city is unbearable...To the Vietnamese, Ho's death marked the end of a dramatic era of their country which had been fighting against the 'American aggression' for years" (*Bangkok Post*, 4 October 1970).

With reference to the Viet Kieu, since they were seen as a potential threat to the Thai national security due to their loyalty to Ho Chi Minh and Hanoi, they became one of the main targets of anti-Communist propaganda, especially in the Northeast. As of 1951, anti-communist tracts written in *quoc ngu* [Romanized Vietnamese] insisted that

the communists did not respect religions, that they sabotaged Buddhist temples, and defrocked the monks (Goscha. 199: 324). Concerning the Vietnamese who were arrested on the charge of being “communists”, they were described as “brutal communists” who would not hesitate to “kill whoever without arms equipped, regardless of whether they were officials or normal people” (Trinh. 1961: 77). During the military rule, by and large the refugees were pictured in the military propaganda as those who “eat national [Thai] rice, [but] worship [a] Communist father”.

It is worth noting that the anti-Vietnamese campaign, as Flood points out (1977: 38), was reinforced by American counterinsurgency research which tended to paint the ominous picture of the refugee communities as a “small vanguard of Vietnamese race and culture” in Thailand. “The huge volume of anti-communist writing generated in the last two decades by Americans in and about Thailand and force-fed to the Thai through American cultural control of Thai socializing institutions and direct American education of the Thai ‘socializers’ naturally resulted in Thai writings, inspired, knowing or otherwise, by American counter-insurgency syndromes” (1977: 38). In short, the northeastern Vietnamese refugees who expressed their respect to Ho Chi Minh became a “problem”. “Although even the highest Thai police officials, when pressed, have had to candidly admit that none of this was true, the campaign went on and the myths grew” (1977: 38).

Ban on Ho Chi Minh’s pictures and associated ceremonies

Together with anti-communist propaganda in which Ho Chi Minh was one of its targets given the popularity of the Vietnamese president among the Viet Kieu, the Thai government attempted to lessen the influence of Ho in Vietnamese communities. Accordingly, from 1951, the Vietnamese could no longer display the photo of Ho Chi Minh in their shops or at homes¹⁸. Whoever found keeping Ho’s pictures could be seen as communists and therefore would be exposed to being arrested.

As some of the ethnic Thai Vietnamese recalled¹⁹, in the wake of Thailand’s recognition of the Bao Dai government, the Viet Kieu were asked to bring down Ho’s pictures and the Thai police started searching Viet Kieu houses in the Northeast to enforce the ban. In some areas such as Ban May, Nakhon Phanom, whoever was found

¹⁸ Goscha (1999: 324), Trinh (1961: 75). Also interviews with some of the ethnic Thai Vietnamese in Bangkok in 2006 and in Nakhon Phanom in May 2007 attested these sources.

¹⁹ According to interviews conducted in Bangkok in 2006 and in Nakhon Phanom in May 2007

to have Ho's pictures in their houses could be arrested. Many, thus, had to hide Ho's pictures from the police. In response to the Viet Kieu's turning Ho's image into altars for worshipping the motherland and the ancestors, the Thai government took further step of imposing a ban on the altars, and the police were charged with the task of dissolving these altars in Viet Kieu houses.

Moreover, the Thai government also prohibited community activities that could be linked to Ho Chi Minh and the DRV. Accordingly, the Viet Kieu could no longer celebrate Ho's birthday and the National Day. In 1969, amidst the Viet Kieu's mourning ceremony in the wake of Ho's death, in many northeastern provinces such as Nakhon Phanom and Nong Khai, military-affiliated groups attacked whoever took part in the ceremony, especially those who shaved their hair to pay tribute to Ho²⁰. "When the Vietnamese community congregated 12,000 strong to conduct memorial services for Ho Chi Minh, participants were attacked unprovoked by police who confiscated and destroyed pictures of Ho in the most degrading manner" (Boonsanong. 1974: 22). Under Thanom's era, especially from 1970 on, the Thai government ordered arrest of those who dared to organize ceremonies of Ho's birthday and put them in jail in the "rehabilitation camp" Latbuakhao, citing "political gathering" of the Viet Kieu as the reason for the roundup (Tuan. 1977: 41).

However, it is worth noting that in relation to Ho's death, the Thai government did not officially ban the Viet Kieu from organizing community ceremonies to pay tribute to their beloved leader. This probably came as a result of new political developments in the late 1960s. Since 1968-1969, the US had effectively faced defeat in Vietnam and begun to wind down its operations. The *Tet* Offensive in 1968 considerably reduced the American people's support for the war effort and led to President Johnson's decision to begin disengagement. In Thailand, the military was losing their legitimacy to rule amidst democratic movements, especially those affiliated with students. As a result, the new constitution was proclaimed in 1968 and the election of the lower house was set in February 1969. This somewhat helped to dilute anti-communist stance of the Thai government and increased the belief that the US might "abandon" Thailand amidst the growing tide of the Thai progressive forces as well as the victory of North Vietnam over the South.

²⁰ From interviews conducted from 20-22 May 2007 in Nakhon Phanom. Accordingly, military-affiliated groups even attacked monks who took part in the ceremony.

Also mitigation of anti-Vietnamese measures was partly attributed to the causal belief that it would help to distance the Viet Kieu from assisting the Thai insurgents. In 1967 the 7th PSYOP Group released a report contending that “If the North Vietnamese refugees actively join in the [CPT] fighting, the situation will become very serious”. This belief was reinforced by the 26 July 1968 attack on the large Udon air base by a band of unidentified guerrillas²¹. Many Thai senior officials thought that it was no problem with the Viet Kieu’s contribution to the national unification struggle in Vietnam unless they did not actively assist the Thai insurgents. Some, such as Deputy Prime Minister Praphas Charusathiara and the then Nong Khai Governor, now publicly referred to the Viet Kieu’s movements as patriotic activities. As a result, the Viet Kieu could manage to organize mourning ceremonies for Ho Chi Minh’s death. However, as mentioned above, the military and the police implicitly encouraged anti-Communist groups to attack the Vietnamese and discourage them from joining the ceremony.

5.2. Ho Chi Minh’s role in the DRV’s Thailand policy

After the DRV officially announced its affiliation with the socialist camp in the wake of the establishment of the PRC, North Vietnam’s policy, particularly in foreign affairs, was still significantly influenced by Ho Chi Minh and his thought on the Vietnamese revolution. Prior to the 1954 Geneva Conference, which wound up the complete defeat of the French and marked the beginning of an American intervention in Indochina, “the thumbprint of Ho could be found on various documents approved by the congress” (Duiker. 2000: 439). In the liberated zone, the Vietnamese president, as Duiker notes, was highly visible, “acting not only as a war strategist, but also a chief recruiter and cheerleader for the revolutionary cause”. He was seen “everywhere at the front, in the villages, in the rice fields, and at local cadre meetings. Dressed like a simple peasant, he moved tirelessly among his followers, cajoling his audiences and encouraging them to sacrifice all for the common objective” (2000: 443).

However, adhering to the model of collective leadership, since the late 1950s, the Vietnamese president paid more attention to the DRV’s foreign policy and national unification while delegating executive authority to younger colleagues, increasingly limiting himself to an avuncular role in domestic and party affairs. Some scholars (Duiker. 2000, Trung. 1985) suggest that the decline of Ho’s dominant role within the

²¹ According to Poole (1970: 101-102), speculations were rife in Thailand that the attack was taken by a North Vietnam commando squad.

party came as a result of the rise of Chinese influence over the movement in the early 1950s. Nevertheless, being president of the DRV and chairman of the party, Ho presided over or attended meetings of the DRV Council of Ministers, the Politburo and Central Committee, and gave advice and opinions to his colleagues. As General Vo Nguyen Giap recalled, “Later on, there were contributions to the party by brothers Truong Chinh and Le Duan and other Central Committee’s members, but President Ho Chi Minh still played the main role in leading the revolution” (Giap. 2006: 70).

In terms of the DRV’s foreign relations and policy, Ho Chi Minh’s role was still predominant. Being the most experienced figure in the diplomatic sphere, Ho was instrumental in forming the DRV’s foreign policy in line with his thought on principles-tactics, friends-foes, people’s power and solidarity. Being president of the DRV, he led Vietnamese delegations in diplomatic and working trips to “friendly and diplomatic” countries. On behalf of the government, he announced the DRV’s foreign policy, gave interviews to the press, and signed diplomatic documents. According to Duiker (2000: 519), during the peak of the Vietnam War, Ho played his usual role as the DRV’s chief diplomat by taking a prominent part in the effort to win support from Hanoi’s allies for the unification effort.

Like in the previous period, the “Ho Chi Minh factor” was instrumental in shaping the DRV’s Thailand policy. This was reflected in Hanoi’s perception of Thailand in the context of the Cold War as well as the party’s Viet Kieu policy. Unsurprisingly, the DRV’s perception of Thailand was put into a broader worldview about the “imperialist expansion” led by the US and “regional democratic and national liberation movements”, particularly in Laos and Cambodia. As usual, this perception and the party’s Viet Kieu policy were considerably affected by Ho’s beliefs in the evolution of human society to socialism, national independence and unification, people’s power and solidarity, and in the relationship between principles and tactics, and between friends and foes.

5.2.1. Hanoi’s perception of Thailand and Thai-Vietnamese confrontation

Based on the Marxist worldview, Ho believed that imperialism was the last development stage of capitalist mode of production; and human society was advancing to an era of socialism. As a result, imperialism was the main enemy of the world’s peace, development and democracy. The birth of the PRC, the growing expansion of socialism in East Europe, the development of national liberation and anti-imperialist

movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America, as well as anti-war and democratic movements in the world further reinforced his belief. In the context of the anti-imperialist victories in Asia, Africa and Latin America during the 1950s, Ho and other DRV leaders saw the struggle for national liberation together with the economic and military progress of the socialist camp in its competition with the capitalist countries as the key to defeating imperialism. Hanoi, as Porter observed (1983: 4), believed that the national liberation movement was steadily “eating away at imperialism’s ‘rear area’ thus critically weakening the entire imperialist system”, especially the US.

Addressing at the closing section of the 7th open meeting of the Central Committee on 12 March 1955, Ho remarked, “Since the beginning of our resistance, the peaceful and democratic forces as well as the socialist camp have been significantly advancing. The Soviet Union and new democratic Eastern European countries have enjoyed solidly based development; Chinese revolution has been successful. Our side consists of 12 countries with over 900 million population...Additionally there are 500 million people in India, Indonesia, Myanmar, who have escaped from colonial status, all advocate peace. Not to mention people in capitalist countries, they also love peace. 1400 million people, equal over half of the world population, stand on the peace side, resolutely opposing to war” (Ho Chi Minh. 1987a: 179). In an article about Leninism published in 1962, Ho boldly stated that “Together with the communist force, national liberation forces have also strongly and quickly developed. Not long ago, almost all Asian, African and Latin American countries were colonies or dependent states of colonialists and imperialists. Nowadays the majority of them have gained independence and freedom. The two great forces are bringing colonialism to the end” (Ho Chi Minh. 1987b: 345).

Unsurprisingly, the US and its allies were seen by Ho Chi Minh and the ICP as the enemy of national liberation movements as well as socialism; and Vietnam was “a front station against imperialism and colonialism in Southeast Asia” (Luan. 2004: 151). As early as November 1945, the party Central Committee issued a resolution entitled “Resistance and Reconstruction”, stating that “Although the US is still talking of its neutrality in Indochina, the US already secretly helps the French to let the French borrow ships to send troops to Indochina. On the other hand, the US wants to compete with Great Britain and France for advantages in Indochina and Southeast Asia; on the other hand, it also wants to cooperate with Great Britain and France in establishing an

alliance to encircle the Soviet Union and therefore may be willing to sacrifice some of its interests in Southeast Asia” (cited in Duiker. 2000: 352).

This belief was further reinforced by the US’s and South Vietnam regime’s violation of the 1954 Geneva Accords. In the 6th plenum of the 3rd Central Committee held from 15-17 July 1954, the Vietnamese president pointed out that “After the Dien Bien Phu campaign, the US has changed its intervention policy in order to drag out and globalize the Indochinese war, to breach the Geneva Accord, to find ways to replace the French to invade Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, to turn the peoples of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia into slaves of the US...At this time, the US is the main enemy of the people in the world and is becoming the main and direct enemy of the Indochinese peoples. All of our efforts, therefore, aim at fighting against the imperialist US. Any countries, people that are not on good terms with the US are able to be on our side” (cited in Ly. 2005: 125). This was followed by a resolution passed by the politburo on 5 September 1954, which stated that “the US imperialist and its lackeys are planning to disvalue the Geneva Agreement in order to permanently divide Vietnam”. The resolution also emphasized that the objective of the revolution was to oppose to “the war policy of the US imperialist” as well as “the US’s plan to organize an aggressive bloc of Southeast Asia [i.e. SEATO]”, and was “to consolidate peace in Indochina, to protect peace in Southeast Asia and in the world” (cited in Ly. 2005: 126).

From this standpoint, the fact that Thailand was closely aligned with the US, holding anti-Communist ideology, and being “a bastion against Communist expansion in the region”, suggests that the Thai military regime was seen as a US’s “lackey” and “enemy” of the Vietnam revolution as well as that of Laos and Cambodia. As Porter points out (1983: 3-4), from Hanoi’s viewpoint, Thailand was another typical example of American “neocolonialism” in the 1950s and 1960s. When Thailand decided to align itself with the US in 1950 and recognized the French-sponsored Bao Dai regime, the Vietnamese viewed this decision as “a loss of Thailand’s independence to US imperialism”.

This belief was strengthened with the birth of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in 1954. Referring to the organization as “an aggressive bloc”, Ho remarked, “The US imperialist is planning to have its lackeys approve the overall aggressive scheme on Indochinese countries” (Ho Chi Minh. 1987a: 136). Talking about the February 1955 SEATO conference in Bangkok to discuss security policies and measures in Southeast Asia, the Vietnamese president commented that “The

Bangkok conference's decision has been approved by the US long before. What the US's surrenders and lackeys in the conference did was to raise their hands as the US instructed" (1987a: 173).

As a result, the Thai military regime was considered to be one of the US's "surrenders and lackeys"; and the Vietnamese leaders, as Porter points out (1983), included Thailand among those countries where imperialism had to be attacked by the "national liberation movement", i.e. either Communist or non-Communist forces who were struggling to gain complete independence in countries dominated by imperialism. At the peak of the Vietnam War which saw the direct intervention of the US, since Thailand was a critical base for US war plans in Vietnam, not to mention the presence of Thai troops in South Vietnam, Hanoi saw the military regime as the enemy of the Vietnamese revolution (Porter. 1983: 2).

Another idea Ho Chi Minh held that was supported by the party and that undoubtedly had impacts on Vietnam-Thailand interactions involved solidarity and international responsibility, first and foremost with Lao and Cambodian revolutions, and not less importantly with the Thai "democratic revolution" led by the CPT and progressive forces. At a special meeting on political issues held from 27-29 March 1964, Ho pointed out that "the foreign policy of the party and the state is to strengthen solidarity with socialist countries..., resolutely to fight against the policy of invasion and aggression of capitalism, led by the US..., to support struggles for independence and national liberation as well as movements of the worker class and of the peoples in the world for peace, national independence, democracy and socialism" (Lien and Hong. 2005: 364).

Considering that the Indochinese peoples, especially the Laotian, shared the same fate under French colonialists and then US imperialists and interventionists, and that Laos and Cambodia could play important roles in protecting Vietnam's western flank as well as in carrying out military campaigns for the national unification cause, Ho Chi Minh and other Hanoi leaders always emphasized the need to unite with Lao and Cambodian peoples to fight against imperialism.

Giving interview to the press on 25 July 1950 on US intervention in Indochina, the Vietnamese president said, "the US imperialists are seeking more and more to oust the French colonialists and impose complete control over Indochina...To gain independence, the Indochinese peoples must totally defeat the French colonialists, the enemy number one. At the same time, we must oppose to the US intervention...Close

solidarity between the peoples of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos constitutes a force capable of defeating the French colonialists and the US interventionists” (Ho Chi Minh. 1973: 94-95). Addressing at the meeting participated by three revolutionary representatives of three countries in September 1952, the Vietnamese president emphasized “If only the Vietnamese resistance succeeds, then that of Laos and Cambodia; and if only the struggle of Laos and Cambodia succeeds, that of Vietnam can be definitely successful” (Ly. 2005: 85).

In the wake of the establishment of the SEATO, Ho pointed out that “The US is also speeding up its plan to turn Lao and Cambodia into its colonies and military bases...The Indochinese peoples acutely expose the new plot of the US imperialist and its followers. The Indochinese people seriously denounce the Southeast Asian aggressive bloc...Protecting the result of the Geneva Conference, the peoples of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia resolutely deter the aggressive hand of the US imperialist and are determined to strengthen our struggle to preserve national rights which have been attained” (Ho Chi Minh. 1987a: 140).

After Cambodia gained independence under the leadership of Samdech Nodorom Sihanouk since 1954, Ho Chi Minh and other party leaders, while maintaining friendly relations with the Cambodian leader, supported the Lao Patriotic Front and “the struggle of the Lao people against the US’s plot to intervene in Laos, the policy of peace, neutrality, national conciliation of prime minister Phouma” and assisted Pathet Lao to build up their strength to “fight against the US and rightist forces” (Lien and Hong. 2005: 376-377). However, it was not until 1959, more than a year after the destruction of the first coalition as a result of US intervention after “remarkably free and fair elections” in Laos (Stuart-Fox. 1997: 102), that the DRV activated a new support group (Doan 959) to arm and supply a renewed Pathet Lao “insurgency” (1997: 104).

Unsurprisingly, like in the past when the two kingdoms competed with each other for influence over Laos and Cambodia, the Thais and the Vietnamese once again saw them standing on two different fronts concerning these issues. This time it was driven by the Cold War mentality. Interestingly, while in the feudal era, the Siamese extended assistance to the Nguyen Lord family in the face of the Tay Son’s uprising, in the Cold War context, the North Vietnamese expressed their sympathy for the Thai “national democratic revolution” led by the CPT.

Adopting the same approach as it did with Laos, during the 1960s the Vietnamese leaders voiced their support for the CPT. Hanoi, as Porter (1983: 12) points

out, viewed Thailand in terms of the contradiction between the “comprador bourgeoisie” and other counterrevolutionary elements in Thailand and the revolutionary classes – the proletariat, the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie. The only way Thailand could change its relationship with US imperialism and win its independence, in Hanoi’s belief, was through a national democratic revolution; and in the early 1960s the CPT was seen as “the only force capable of leading the revolution” (Porter. 1983: 12). This led to certain assistance North Vietnam extended to the CPT. However, the assistance seemed to be confined in terms of ideology and revolutionary lines rather than material support.

Though the Thai military regime continuously, especially since 1965, accused the North Vietnamese, and hence the Viet Kieu of actively supporting the insurgents in Thailand, the only evidence available was of a school opened in North Vietnam for training the Thai communists. According to Porter (1983: 5-6), the Vietnamese endorsed the Thai Party’s armed struggle line and provided military training for CPT cadres. Nevertheless, a former Vietnamese senior party cadre confirmed that actually the main training center for the Thai communists was in China and the school in North Vietnam mostly functioned as a transit station. Disagreeing with the Chinese Communists on the methods to carry out revolution, i.e. “using the countryside to surround the towns”, “protracted war”, and “the authorities on the gun barrel”, the Vietnamese tried to persuade their Thai comrades during their stay in Vietnam of the need to combine “democratic forces” in cities and rural areas with military forces²². The policy was in line with Ho’s thought on revolutionary methods. It is worth recalling that at a meeting of the Politburo in October 1961 to decide the policy for national unification, Ho recommended a strategy based on guerrilla warfare, the mobilization of the support of the masses, and winning the battle of public opinion in the world arena (Duiker. 2000: 529).

Together with the belief on solidarity, Ho’s thought on maximizing friends and minimizing foes also left its stamp on Thailand-Vietnam interactions. Under Ho’s leadership, the emphasized strategy in foreign affairs was to unite with whoever can be able to unite with, take advantage of whoever can be taken advantage of, mobilize whoever can be mobilized, at the same time to divide and isolate the enemy (Ly. 2005: 128). Though perceiving the US and its allies as enemy to national liberation as well as

²² According to the interview conducted in Hanoi on 5 January 2008 with a former senior party official.

democratic movements, like in the resistance against the French, the Vietnamese president always emphasized the need to differentiate the governments who “supported war policy” and anti-Communist measures from their “progressive people”.

The same approach was employed for the Thais. Receiving the Viet Kieu who were repatriated on 10 January 1960, Ho Chi Minh said “I would like to thank the Thai people for their invaluable assistance to the Viet Kieu. Thank to the Thai government for seriously implementing the agreements” (Thin and Thanyathip. 2006: 236). He concluded his speech by praising “Long lasting the friendship between the Vietnamese and the Thai peoples” (2006: 237).

The belief laid the background for Ho’s concept of people’s diplomacy. As early as September 1947, in the wake of the resistance against the French, the Central Committee issued an instruction pointing out the need to speed up people’s diplomacy in order to call for support from the international community for the struggle of the Vietnamese people (Ly. 2005: 118). In February 1951, the party highlighted the task of expanding people’s diplomacy and protecting overseas Vietnamese (Luan. 2004: 146). Giving interview to Macta Rohat, a Cuban journalist of the *Granma*, on 14 July 1969, Ho remarked “The strength, the greatness, and the persistence of the Vietnamese people lie in their solidarity as well as in support of people in the world” (Ly. 2005: 92). This policy was undoubtedly observed by the party branch in Thailand with the slogan of “building Thai-Vietnamese friendship”.

5.2.2. *The party’s Viet Kieu policy*

With the onset of the Cold War and political shifts in Thailand, the party’s policy during the Seri Thai era was changed. According to Hoang Van Hoan, in January 1950, during Ho’s visit to Peking, the Vietnamese president met Hoan to discuss the rapid change in international and regional situation. Having heard Hoan’s report on the deteriorating conditions in Thailand, Ho told Hoan that with the Chinese now aiding the Vietnamese resistance, priorities would be “shifted from Thailand to China” (Goscha. 1999: 333). In order to back the revolution in Vietnam as well as in Laos and Cambodia, the focus of the DRV’s Thailand policy was now on the Viet Kieu.

Like in Vietnam, the role of the “Ho Chi Minh factor” was notable in the party’s Viet Kieu policy in Thailand. Here Ho’s image was used not only to link the Viet Kieu politically, economically and culturally to contribute to the national independence and unification struggle but also to carry out the party’s policies and lines in Thailand. In the

Cold War context, given anti-Vietnamese sentiment among the Thai ruling elite, in order to win support of the Thais for the Viet Kieu, the main policy the party promoted was that of building up Thai-Vietnamese friendship.

The “Ho Chi Minh factor” in Viet Minh’s strategy to mobilize the Viet Kieu

Realizing that the name Ho Chi Minh had a strong attractiveness to the Viet Kieu, the ICP quickly capitalized on that to mobilize the Vietnamese for revolutionary activities. As a result, by and large Ho’s image was “utilized” to propagate the Viet Minh’s policy, to win support from the Viet Kieu and link them together politically, economically and culturally. Unsurprisingly, among the main tasks of the ICP, among others, were to promote patriotism among the Viet Kieu; to encourage and accommodate the Viet Kieu to show their patriotism and esteem Ho as a national liberation leader; and to organize Vietnamese traditional festivals and important ceremonies such as *Tet* festivals (Vietnamese New Year), the National Day (Sep 2nd), and Ho’s birthday (May 19th)²³.

It is worth noting that by the late 1940s, the Viet Minh had set up a wide network among the Viet Kieu. At the top of it was the Central Committee, initially placed in Udon Thani and then moved from province to province to maintain security. Under it were provincial committees which were located in major provinces which had a large number of Vietnamese such as Nakhon Phanom, Mukdahan, Thabo, Sakhon Nakhon, Khon Kaen, Khorat, Nong Khai, Ubon, Surin, Chantaboun, Prachinburi and Bangkok. Each provincial committee was responsible for district committees, which supervised village committees (“Chom” or “Xom” in Vietnamese). Each *Chom* had a number of classified groups (*To*), such as *To* for women, *To* for parents and and *To* for various young groups structured according to ages.

Through ICP-organized Viet Kieu associations, Ho Chi Minh was revered and his “teachings” were widely disseminated. Generally, the situation in Vietnam and Ho’s image were kept alive through simple but effective instruments of media: radio and newspaper. Radio Vietnam (Voice of Vietnam) from Hanoi was broadcast daily. Here it is worth noting that almost every year since Ho’s government returned to Hanoi in 1954, via radio the Vietnamese president sent a new year greeting letter to the Vietnamese people, including the Viet Kieu who Ho referred to with the term “Kieu

²³ Cited from the historical document titled “Tasks, methods and lines of the Viet Kieu revolutionary organization from 1945-1975” published in 1976 - Stored up in the Library of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Hanoi.

bao” (Overseas nationals or the people who share the same origin but live abroad, literally this term make the recipients feel closer to the country than the term Viet Kieu), praising them for their contribution to the national liberation and unification causes and encouraging them to do more for the causes.

Besides, Ho’s image was attached to community activities. By and large the Vietnamese were encouraged to hang Ho’s picture in *Tet* festivals, celebrations of the National Day, Ho’s birthday and even weddings. Since the birth of the DRV, Ho’s birthday became one of the main festivals celebrated by the Viet Kieu either among the community or in families. As for wedding, it became common practice that before greeting the guests, the bride and the groom would take the oath of husband and wife in front of Ho’s image with the witness of their relatives. In these community activities, songs about the homeland, the national liberation cause, and Ho Chi Minh were popular.

Together with propaganda materials, through the network, policies and instructions from Hanoi were transferred down from central organizations to the cells. Many of these policies or instructions were tactically attached to Ho Chi Minh’s call for national resistance. As Goshcha notes, “In Jan 1947, a meeting of the Viet Kieu General Association was held in Udon. During this meeting, Ho’s call for nationwide resistance was studied and ways were discussed to implement it among the Viet Kieu in Thailand, Laos and Cambodia” (1999: 205).

At the local level, regularly the leader of *Chom* convened a meeting once a month to inform members of the situation in Vietnam and the political development in Thailand. Usually members were encouraged to “follow Uncle Ho’s teachings”, to contribute to the national liberation cause, to assist one another in life and work, to respect Thai laws and establish friendly and fruitful relationship with local people. Also each *Chom* should organize a class for children of member families to learn various subjects such as the Vietnamese language, math, geography, history and literature²⁴. Often the children were taught to look upon Ho Chi Minh as their national hero and

²⁴ To avoid violating the Thai Private School Act which regulated that a class of more than six students had to apply for a teaching permit, Vietnamese teachers conducted classes for groups of six children each. However, teachers, who were chosen from young Vietnamese who had obtained certain level of education, were generally not qualified enough, while study materials were limited. Thus the classes were conducted in basic standard. Moreover, to avoid the suppression of the police, classes were moved from house to house and children had to get their books as well as notebooks hidden under their clothes when going to class.

beloved leader, and to follow the 5-point teaching of “Uncle Ho”²⁵. For those who got good results in study and did “good things”, i.e. to help family, to respect the elderly, to obey parents, to study hard, and not to use swear words, would be granted the title of “good Uncle Ho’s pupils” and received “Uncle Ho’s candies” as the reward. In the class, for those who did “100 good things”, there would be a ceremony, though small, to “report the good example to Uncle Ho”.

In particular, key party members and active Viet Minh’s supporters saw Ho’s teachings as guiding principles for their operations, i.e. to keep in close touch with the masses, to always set example for the community in work and life, to voluntarily contribute to community works (ceremonies, weddings, funerals) and to be pioneers in every campaign launched by the party. By and large, their examples, their activities, and their strong will for national independence won them support from the Viet Kieu. This contributed to the success of the party in mobilizing the masses for the national liberation cause.

Consequently, the Viet Kieu widely responded to Ho’s call by contributing to the national liberation cause in terms of financial support and manpower. Throughout nearly three decades since 1945, collection of funds for the national resistance against the French colonialists and then for the liberation cause against the American interventionists was encouraged among the Viet Kieu, especially on the occasions of special events such as Ho’s birthday, the National Day or the *Tet* festival. Also thousands of young Viet Kieu headed to Laos, Cambodia or returned Vietnam to join the people’s army.

People’s diplomacy: Building Thai-Vietnamese friendship

As mentioned above, Ho Chi Minh became not only the symbol of the nation and of the national liberation cause but also the cultural icon. As a result, Ho’s thoughts about the need to call for international assistance and sympathy for the national liberation of Vietnam, and not least his teachings about building up the Thai-Vietnamese friendship were taken not only as party policies but also as guidelines for the Viet Kieu in their life. Consequently, the Vietnamese were able to win invaluable support and sympathy from not only the local people but also local officials.

25

1. Love country and compatriots; 2. Well study and work (in accordance with the age and strength); 3. Well unite and keep disciplines; 4. Keep body and environment clean; 5. Be modest, truthful and courageous.

As for the party, building up the friendship between the Thai and the Vietnamese was defined as a “strategic issue” and the “matter of live or death” (Tuan. 1977: 53). Main policies, adopted throughout the “revolutionary period” and influenced by Ho’s thought, emphasized strategies, principles and methods to promote the Thai-Vietnamese friendship in the form of people’s diplomacy.

Accordingly, the strategy was to “maximize support, minimize dislike and suppression” in order to ensure “more friends, and less enemies” by encouraging the Viet Kieu as a whole to be responsible for building up the friendship; winning support of the Thai people to the Viet Kieu, first for their daily life, then for their revolutionary activities; and winning support of the local authorities to minimize suppression from the central government. The motto for developing the Thai-Vietnamese friendship was “frequency, steadiness, extensiveness, activeness and organization” (Tuan. 1977: 55). Unsurprisingly, Ho’s teachings about righteous behaviors and the need to bolster “brotherhood sentiments” between the Thai and the Vietnamese were cited as social rationale to implement the party policy.

The principle for building Viet-Thai friendship was set clear and thoroughly transmitted among the Viet Kieu: (1) respect local custom, social order, regulations and laws; (2) not intervene in the internal affairs of Thailand; and (3) retain and consolidate the representative role for the Viet Kieu before the Thai authorities. Regarding the non-intervention principle, two factors were particularly singled out, i.e. the issue of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) and of the presence of the US troop in Thailand. Accordingly, direct support for the CPT in terms of logistics and manpower was mostly avoided. According to interviews with non-Communists officials during 1966-1967 conducted by Poole (1970: 96-97), the ICP and then the Labor Party branch in Thailand was believed to concern itself almost “exclusively with the Vietnamese communities” and it had “little contact with Thai or Chinese Communist organizations” in Thailand. Also the Viet Kieu reiterated their standpoint that though they supported the struggle against the US’s involvement in South Vietnam, they saw the presence of the US troop in Thailand as the internal affair of the country (Tuan. 1977)²⁶. However, Hanoi was accused by Bangkok, with intelligence support from the US, of training Thai dissidents

²⁶ However, at the height of the Vietnam War, reports were made about the attacks taken by the Vietnamese commandos into the US bases in Thailand, especially in Udon Thani (Porter. 1983: 13)

in Vietnam and of masterminding attacks on air bases used by the US air force at Udon Thani and Ubon Ratchathani²⁷.

In order to implement the strategy, importance was attached to expanding the friendship relations to broad strata of Thai society, i.e. the masses, intellectuals, monks, and government officials. With regard to the local people, brotherhood swearing practices, called "*Ket xieu*", were encouraged. Moreover, influential and respectable individuals were singled out for the Viet Kieu's lobbying for their sympathy. To accommodate the implementation, "Viet-Thai groups" were established in each *Chom* to encourage and guide the Vietnamese for their actions. The policy was to strive to gain support of figures who bore neutral views about the Vietnamese revolution; to patiently and continuously neutralize those who held unfriendly sentiments towards North Vietnam and gradually win their support; to take every chance to attend Thai festivals and ceremonies, charity and humanitarian activities; to actively contribute to local community welfare, and to get on well with the Thai people in daily life.

Based on the policy, campaigns for "following Uncle Ho's teachings to build up the Thai-Vietnamese friendship" had been launched. The Viet Kieu was now seen to go to the pagoda to attend Thai traditional ceremonies; to offer foods to monks; to assist their Thai neighbors whenever the Thais needed help in work and life, such as ploughing, harvesting, digging wells, building houses, and offering vocational training to the Thais; to attend Thai festivals; to join the Thai in receiving royal members; to "*Ket xieu*" with Thai friends; to contribute to community works such as building roads, pagodas; and to establish good contacts with local officials, local police as well as soldiers, intellectuals, teachers and other respectable figures. For those who were repatriated during 1960-1964, they handed down their trade to their neighbors, including Sino-Thais and Thais. The Viet Kieu also constructed works as the token of their gratitude to the Thais, who had extended valuable assistance to them even when the refugees were in trouble, such as construction of a performance stage in a public park in Udon Thani, a clock tower in Nakhon Phanom, pagoda gates in Mukdahan, Nakhon Phanom, Sakol Nakhon, Udon Thani, Khon Kaen, a bell tower in Sakon

²⁷ The attack on the Udon air base caused a revival of the perennial question of the degree of North Vietnamese support of dissident activity in northeastern Thailand. But after the attack, a US spokesman for the embassy said that he saw no evidence that the attack pointed to an "escalation" of North Vietnamese support for insurgency in the Northeast or that it was likely to signal the start of a general wave of guerrilla attacks on American military personnel or bases used by them in Thailand (Poole. 1970: 101-102)

Nakhon, a library in Tha Bo and in Nong Khai (Thin and Thanyathip. 2006: 230-231, 294-295).

At the same time, the Viet Kieu played the role of the DRV's "ambassadors" who introduced to the Thais the Vietnamese tradition, Viet Kieu's patriotism, and the DRV's "just struggle for national independence and unification". Also they brought Ho's image as the one who was representative of the poor and oppressed peoples, who devoted his life to national interests, and who taught the Viet Kieu to live righteously and gratefully to the Thais. In the wake of Ho's death, his will was translated into Thai to be distributed to Viet Kieu's local Thai friends to help them to understand more about the Vietnamese leader.

Consequently, the Viet Kieu were able to win broad support and sympathy of the Thai people in the Northeast, not only for their daily life but also for their revolutionary activities. As the leaders of the party branch in Thailand recalled (Tuan. 1977, Trinh. 1961), many Thai people ignored the government's anti-communist propaganda as well as prohibition on making contacts with the Viet Kieu to stand by the Vietnamese; many Viet Kieu's *xieu* did not hesitate to join their friends on the occasions of the Vietnamese National Day, *Tet* festivals, and Ho's birthday; many Buddhist monks wrote letters to the Thai authorities to express sympathy for the Viet Kieu who were arrested or forced to be repatriated back to South Vietnam; also many monks, while making ceremonies for the Viet Kieu on the occasions of the National Day and Ho's birthday, praised the Vietnamese struggle for the national liberation cause as well as Ho's moral life and his tireless efforts to fight for national independence. As some Viet Kieu recalled, in the wake of Ho's death, in order to prevent the refugees from organizing a mourning ceremony for Ho at Wat Ban Chich in Udon Thani, the Thai security agencies had asked the abbot not to make merit ceremonies as the Viet Kieu appealed. However, the monk refused and proceeded with the ritual. After the mourning, he even used the wreaths to make flower effigies of "Buddha Ho" to be distributed to the Viet Kieu as well as local Thais²⁸.

At the height of the Thai government's suppression of the Viet Kieu, many Thai people extended assistance to the Vietnamese, hiding them from the police, agreeing to take care of the Viet Kieu's children as well as their belongings in order to circumvent destruction conducted by military-affiliated groups; many Thai hawkers refused to join

²⁸ According to interviews with ethnic Vietnamese Thais conducted in Udon Thani on 6 November 2007

military-affiliated groups to destroy the Viet Kieu's assets; many Thai journalists as well as students voiced their support for the Vietnamese national liberation. Even many local officials and police lent tacit assistance to the Viet Kieu. When the Thai government adopted travel restriction policy, thanks to the support from local authorities, many Vietnamese were able to go beyond their restricted areas²⁹. They even received "tips" from the local officials or police about possible police raids to escape from being arrested. Though the circumstance reflected in these sources may be somewhat exaggerated, this undoubtedly showed the friendship built between the Vietnamese and the Thais. Also this helps to partly explain why the Thai government's efforts to control the refugees, as Chan (1960: 53) admits, had failed. In this respect, it is worth citing Flood's observation on the relationship between the Thais and the Viet Kieu. "American anthropologists and counterinsurgency bureaucrats have tended to equate Thai ruling class policies and politics with 'the Thai people' and thereby posited an undocumentable impression of 'natural antipathy' or ethnic animosity between Thai and Vietnamese...In the case of the Vietnamese, 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 20th century" (1977: 34).

5.3. Conclusion

The coming of the Cold War to Southeast Asia drove Thailand and Vietnam into opposite directions. While the Thai ruling elite based their worldview on capitalism and anti-Communism, the Vietnamese communist party, i.e. the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) and then the Vietnamese Labor Party (VLP), under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh were attached to their ideology of Marxism-Leninism. The confrontation between Thailand and Vietnam, therefore, to a large extent represented the conflict between the two opposite ideologies in Southeast Asia. As a result, not only did this confrontation involve the leading forces of the two camps, i.e. the US, on the one hand, the Soviet Union and China, on the other, but also brought the Thais and the Vietnamese back to

²⁹

It is worth noting that the support extended by the Thai local officials and intellectuals probably came not only as the result of good relationship built up, but also from discontent of many northeastern politicians and intellectuals with the centralization of Bangkok and not least the military regime. According to Pasuk and Baker (1995, 2005), since 1932, political leaders of Isan had opposed the increasing centralization of power in Bangkok as well as had protested against the inferior treatment of the northeast. During the 1950s-1960s, the northeasterners (politicians, intellectuals, monks) resisted the soldiers, asking for more funding for development projects. Many turned out to be radicals. Watt (1984) even mentions about separatism in the northeast.

their historical conflict over the Laotian and Cambodian issues, this time driven by an ideological divergence.

Unlike the Seri Thai progressives, the military regime, with the neo-traditional school of thought, though they could not deny that Ho Chi Minh was a great patriot, now saw him as a Communist and tended to picture him as a totalitarian leader who was held responsible for threatening peace, stability and security in the region in the form of "Communism expansion". The perception was a result of not only ideological difference, US influence, of class suppression in North Vietnam in the 1950s, particularly the land reform, but also of Ho's unwavering beliefs in national independence and unification, solidarity and international responsibility, notably concerning Laos and Cambodia, and not least of Ho's popularity among the Viet Kieu in Thailand.

Affected by the perception, seeing significant benefits from siding with the "Free World" in political, economic and military terms, the Thai elite definitely supported the US in its bid to deter communism, which was perceived as contrary to the Thai monarchy and Buddhism, in Southeast Asia. As a result, Ho's DRV was downplayed and the Thai government established diplomatic relations with the French sponsored Associated State of Vietnam and then with the US patronized South Vietnam regime. Moreover, obsessed with the belief that Communism would come to Thailand, especially the Northeast, from Laos and Cambodia, Bangkok played a crucial role in the US's strategy in Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam.

Domestically, based on the perception that Ho Chi Minh's image posed a threat to the Thai national security given Ho's popularity among and his influence over the Viet Kieu to a great extent, the military regime attempted to reduce as much as possible the influence and cut off the connection between the Vietnamese in Thailand and Ho's DRV. Accordingly, the Thai authorities banned the Viet Kieu from hanging Ho's pictures as well as organizing community activities associated with Ho and the DRV. Also US guided anti-Communist propaganda tried to depict Ho's image as a totalitarian leader and the Viet Kieu as a "fifth column". However, anti-Vietnamese measures were tactically tailored to suit political developments, both externally and internally, which led to new causal beliefs of the elite, as in the case of Viet Kieu's organizing ceremonies for Ho's death in 1969.

Like in the previous period, Ho Chi Minh still played an important role in the DRV's foreign relations and Thailand policy. Hanoi's perception of Bangkok as a US's

“lackey” and later as an “enemy” of the Vietnam revolution in particular and of Indochina in general at the peak of the Vietnam War was significantly attributed to Ho’s and other Hanoi leaders’ worldview. As the political situation in Thailand changed to the disadvantage of the DRV, Hanoi’s Thailand policy mostly focused on the Viet Kieu. Unsurprisingly, Ho Chi Minh’s prestige as all-knowing and all-caring was utilized by the party to link the Vietnamese politically, economically and culturally to contribute to the national liberation and unification. Also Ho’s thought on people’s diplomacy was applied by the party for the policy of building up Thai-Vietnamese friendship. As a result, the Viet Kieu could win support of the local Thais to a large extent for their revolutionary activities. Undoubtedly, this laid the background for the Viet Kieu’s integration into Thai society later on.

The confrontation between Thailand and Vietnam during the 1950s-1960s continued on throughout the next two decades. Like in the Ho Chi Minh’s era, the Cold War ideological divergence kept alienating Bangkok from Hanoi. Interestingly, the “Ho Chi Minh factor” still played a certain role in Thailand-Vietnam interactions, especially regarding the Viet Kieu in Thailand. Accordingly, the obsession with “the fifth column” given the unchangeable respect the Viet Kieu held for Ho Chi Minh had been lingering on; and anti-Vietnamese sentiments were blown up especially during the Cambodian conflict. As the ethnic Vietnamese Thais recalled, until the late 1990s they were still afraid to talk in public about their late beloved leader. When the Thai authorities came up with the idea of reconstructing the area the late Vietnamese president used to stay in Siam, the ethnic Vietnamese Thai still dared not answer the Thai officials’ and scholars’ questions concerning the issue.

It was not until the demise of the Cold War that the rapprochement between Thailand and Vietnam really took place. Unlike in the confrontation era, the “Ho Chi Minh factor” has now been somewhat seen by the Thai elite as a catalyst for boosting Thai-Vietnamese friendly relations. This change came as a result of the rise of the new elites in the Thai parliamentary democracy, i.e. the business elite and the party elite, as well as the adaptation of the traditional elites to suit the new circumstances. In the post-Cold War context which saw the trend of globalization and regionalism, new causal beliefs of the Thai ruling elite as well as the resurrection of Ho Chi Minh Thought on diplomacy promoted by the Vietnamese Communist Party helped to bring the two countries closer together. The new dynamics will be elaborated in the following chapter.