



# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Annam-nikai in Thailand

Being a Buddhist nation, Buddhism is practiced by more than 90 percent of the Thai population. Thai Buddhism is often considered to be the most developed Buddhism in South East Asia. Situated in the center of the Southeast Asian peninsula, Thailand's axial position allows it to exert control over both the land and sea routes connecting East Asia to South Asia, and further to Europe. Archeological evidence found in Thailand testifies to the arrival of Chinese and Indian merchants and immigrants in the Dvaravati region (presently Central Thailand). Those foreign merchants brought their culture and religion, exchanging them with the indigenous people. Through this cultural exchange, Buddhism was introduced to Thailand. But, it was only during the Sukhothai period, under the benevolent rule of King Ramkhamheang (1275-1317) that Buddhism was fostered, becoming the Thai state's religion. Inheriting this tradition, Kings of Ayutthaya encouraged the study and practice of Buddhism throughout the Kingdom. Since the beginning of the Rattanakosin period, with fervent support from the Kings, Buddhism flourished in Thailand.

Through more than 700 years of being the national religion, Buddhism has, no doubt, greatly influenced the life of the Thais by encouraging tolerance, hospitality and the love of peace. The Thai people are open not only to Buddhism, but also other religions such as Christianity and Islam. This was shown in the Ayutthaya period, when neighboring countries such as Vietnam suppressed Christianity; Ayutthaya became known as the city of "*Justice and Freedom.*"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Simone de La Loubère*, cited from Pudsadee Chanthawimol, *The Vietnamese in Thailand*, National Research Fund, Bangkok, 1998, p 24.

At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when immigrants escaping from civil war in Vietnam, came to take refuge in Thailand, they received assistance from the Court of Siam as well as recognition from the Thai people. Those immigrants, though staying in Thailand for a short time, established communities based upon their religion. At this time, the Christian community in Samsen and the Buddhist community in Yaowarat (Chinatown) and BangPo were founded. Together with their community, temples were established. Although they are from different schools of Buddhism (Theravada Buddhism in Thailand and Mahayana Buddhism in Vietnam), the Buddhist temples of the Vietnamese immigrants did not cause disharmony in Thai society. Moreover, during the reign of King Rama III, Vietnamese temples and their ceremonies aroused the interest of a Royal progeny (Prince Mongkut) leading to the initial introduction of its ceremonies to the Court of Siam and the recognition as “Annam-nikai,” one of two official Mahayana Buddhist orders in Thailand in 1899.

Originally, this Buddhist sect played an important role as the spiritual center of the Vietnamese in Bangkok; later, due to political and cultural factors, its temple’s supporters gradually changed from the Vietnamese community to the Chinese and Thai communities. This change in the temple’s community had an impact on the adaptation of Annam-nikai. Especially the period after WWII, due to the Thai government’s strict policies toward the refugees, the Vietnamese in Bangkok, had to integrate into Thai society hiding their Vietnamese heritage. This integration of the Vietnamese Buddhist community led to the loosening of contacts among Vietnamese refugees and the loss of connection with Annam-nikai temples in Bangkok. As a result, Chinese and Thai people replaced the Vietnamese as the sect’s supporters. Additionally, the special attention and constant support of the Royal Court since the reign of King Rama IV also plays an important role in legitimating this Buddhist sect, influencing its adaptation.

The remarkable adaptation of Annam-Nikai can be seen in its structural adaptation, namely the adoption of Thai Buddhist hierarchical order, and in its practice such as language used in ceremonies, monastic observances, and temple

ceremonies. Due to these adaptations, this former representative of Vietnamese Buddhism no longer belongs to Vietnamese Buddhism or to the Vietnamese community. Vietnamese monks and laymen are no longer found in Annam-nikai temples. No Vietnamese language is heard in the temples except during the chanting of Sutras; this chanting, however, is not familiar to Vietnamese ears. Its ceremonies, highly recognized in Thai society, are unfamiliar to recent Vietnamese Buddhist arrivals.

## **1.2. Objectives of the Study**

Besides outlining the development of Annam-nikai, this study will examine the adaptation of Annam-nikai in Bangkok. The main thrust of this adaptation is the change of the temple's support base. The reasons for this change in temple support are seen in the sharing and eventual replacement of the Vietnamese with the Chinese and Thai Buddhist communities. The conditions of this replacement come through political and cultural factors; especially of note is the Thai policy during the period encompassing the Indochina War to the post Vietnam War. This period is considered one of the key elements leading to the adaptation of the Vietnamese Buddhist community in Bangkok, resulting in the absence of the Buddhist Vietnamese in Annam-nikai temples. The constant material and spiritual support from Thai society's leadership is considered as one of the conditions leading to the adaptation of Annam-nikai to be independent from the Vietnamese community.

## **1.3. Research Methodology**

Although there is a lack of academic literature, especially in English, on the subject of Annam-nikai and the Vietnamese Buddhist community in Bangkok, the few available materials in Thai, English, and Vietnamese were used as primary resources. Additionally, articles from magazines and newspapers during the Cold

War era provided a good resource of information. Moreover, interviews, surveys, and questionnaires were conducted with concerned people, such as the Buddhist Vietnamese and Annam-nikai followers, as the primary fieldwork.

#### **1.4. Scope and Organization**

Since this thesis examines the development, the conditions and the forms of the adaptation of Annam-nikai in Bangkok, the study contains five chapters with the following headings and foci:

##### **Chapter I: Introduction**

This chapter briefly introduces the history of Annam-nikai up to its present situation in Thai society. The objectives and research methodology of this study will also be explained in this chapter. Moreover, some definitions of terms such as Adaptation, Annam, Ong Chiang Su, Ong Chiang Soon and Wat Yuon will be clarified here before going further into the study.

##### **Chapter II: Development of Annam-nikai in Thailand.**

In this chapter, a study of the migration of Vietnamese people into Thailand will be briefly summarized, providing a background for the introduction for the development of Annam-nikai in Thailand. Additionally, a study of the relationship between temples and their communities will be examined to show the gradual change of the temple community's supporters, which is a key factor leading to the adaptation of Annam-nikai.

##### **Chapter III: Conditions of Adaptation.**

This chapter analyzes the conditions of the adaptation of Annam-nikai. The leading factor of adaptation is the change in temple's support community. The reasons for this change are traced to political and cultural factors. In addition, the support, both direct and indirect, from the Royal Court is also examined as one condition for adaptation.

## Chapter IV: Forms of Adaptation

In this chapter, the forms of adaptation of Annam-nikai are examined in relation to structure, behavior, and function, namely the adoption of Thai Buddhist hierarchical order, the language used in temples, and temple ceremonies.

## Chapter V: Conclusion

The final chapter will discuss the findings of the preceding chapters and draw the conclusion.

### 1.5. Definition of Terms

The objectives of this study are to examine the conditions and forms of the adaptation of Annam-nikai in Bangkok, thus the key term of this study is **adaptation**. In the online Science-Religion Encyclopedia adaptation is defined as *the changes in an organism's structure, function, or behavior that increase its ability to live in a particular environment*.<sup>2</sup> This definition leads to the following aspects for the study of the adaptation Annam-nikai: structural, behavioral and functional.

Annam-nikai is understood by many Thai people as Vietnamese Buddhism in Thailand. But what is Annam? And why was this Buddhist sect named Annam-nikai? To clarify this, let's take a look back to the year 768 when Vietnam was under the Tang dynasty's domination. The Tang dynasty had changed the name of Vietnam (known as Giao Châu at that time) to An Nam (or Annam),<sup>3</sup> which means the Peaceful South or the Pacified South. In 938, Vietnam regained its independence with the glorious victory of Bạch Đằng. Later the country's name was changed to Đại Cồ Việt then to Đại Việt. Nevertheless, prior to the Trịnh – Nguyễn civil war in Vietnam, which lasted

<sup>2</sup> <http://science-religion-encyclopedia/adaptation>

<sup>3</sup> “ In the year of the Monkey (768), equivalent to the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the Great Tang dynasty's calendar, the Tang dynasty changed the name of Giao Chau to Annam--the under-ruled province” [*Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư, The Complete History of Dai Viet*”, Social Science Publishing House, Hanoi 1998, p. 190]

from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Vietnam was found only at the present North and Central area of Vietnam. Therefore, records written about the chaotic civil war in Vietnam during this period often mention the Northern Court and the Southern Court which should be understood as the present Northern and Central part of Vietnam. However, the word An Nam was still used by foreigners, such as the Chinese, Thai, and Westerners, to refer to the Central part of Vietnam during the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Especially of note is the first French domination; the French colonial government divided Vietnam into 3 administrative regions composing Tonkin (Northern Vietnam), An Nam (Central Vietnam), and Cochin China (Southern Vietnam). The maps No1 – No 4 available in the following pages will give a clear picture of this explanation.

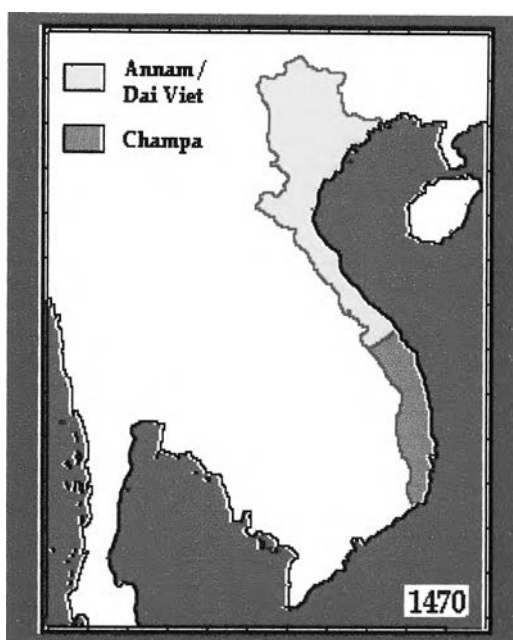
Moreover, Thai records concerning Vietnam usually used the word An Nam to refer to the country of Vietnam, though the official name of Vietnam at that period was Đại Việt. Thus, An Nam is the former name of present day Vietnam. Additionally, *nikai* or *nikaya* in Thai language means the Buddhist sect. Therefore, Annam- nikai, as a result, refers to the Buddhist sect from Vietnam.

Besides the word Annam, Thai historical documents concerning Vietnamese migration into Thailand, often mention the name of “*Ong Chiangsoon*” (องเชียงซูน) and “*Ong Chiangsue*” (องเชียงสือ), but these names can not be found in any of the Vietnamese historical records. This is because their true Vietnamese names were Tôn Thất Xuân and Lord Nguyễn ánh respectively. The word “Ông” in Vietnamese means “Mister” or “Sir” in English, thus, it was used to address all Vietnamese men. Moreover, ChiangSue was transliterated from the Vietnamese version, Thiên Tử, which means the son of God (or son of Heaven). This special title was used to refer to the King or Emperor only; it is not the King’s name. Since Nguyễn Anh was from the ruling family in Huế, this title was used as a way to pay respect to him.

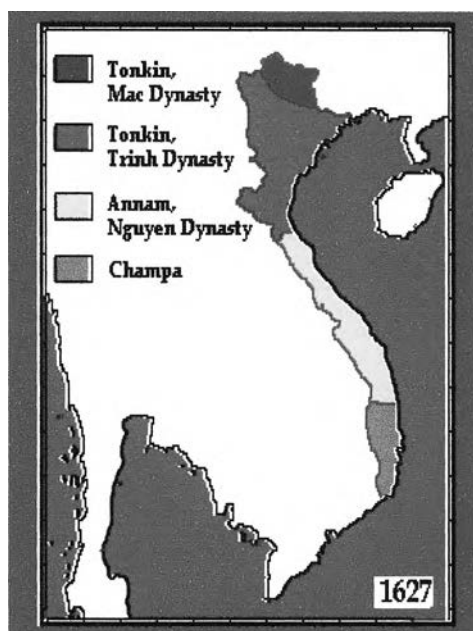
Another common word for Thais referring to Vietnam is *Yuon*. The common supposition in regards to the semantic domains of this word is a Chinese background. In Chinese records, the Viet people were written in Chinese characters as *Yue* which means the Viet ethnic. Since Vietnam and China shared the same writing system in the past, Vietnamese also used *Yue* to identify themselves. Therefore, when it was introduced to Thailand, Thai people used the Chinese word but mispronounced it as “*Yuon*.” Consequently, *Yuon* is the Thai pronunciation to call Viet people and *Wat Yuon* is a Vietnamese temple.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Wat or วัด in Thai language means temple.



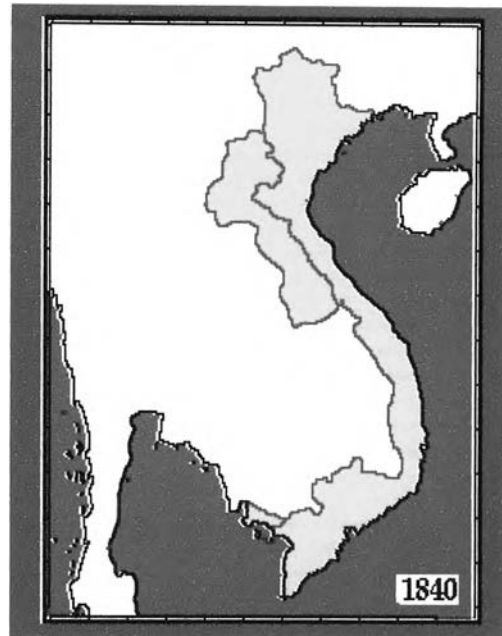
Picture No 1: Map of Đại Việt in 1470: Before the Trinh-Nguyen civil war  
(Source from [www.encyclopedia.com](http://www.encyclopedia.com))



Picture No 2: Map of Đại Việt in 1627: During the Trinh-Nguyen civil war  
(Source from [www.encyclopedia.com](http://www.encyclopedia.com))

(Note: The Trinh Dynasty and the Nguyen Dynasty in this map are the Northern Court and the Southern Court respectively. The official Nguyen Dynasty was founded in 1802)





Picture No 3: Map of Vietnam in 1840: Under the Nguyễn Dynasty  
(Source from [www.encyclopedia.com](http://www.encyclopedia.com))



Picture No 5: Map of Vietnam under 1<sup>st</sup> French domination  
(Source from [www.encyclopedia.com](http://www.encyclopedia.com))