"Thailand and the Vietnamese Resistance Against the French"

by

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In accordance with the requirements of the Australian National University, I hereby formally declare that this thesis is based upon original research conducted by the author.

Christopher E. Goscha

15 April 1991
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To my parents I owe the most. Without their support and encouragement, this thesis would not have been possible.
Abstract

This thesis traces the growth of Vietnamese resistance activities in Thailand from the beginning of the direct French colonisation of Vietnam in 1885 to the victory of the Chinese Communists in 1949. Although Thailand's relative importance to the Vietnamese resistance movement did not increase at a constant rate during this period, but rather fluctuated in response to several factors, there was nevertheless an overall increase in Thailand's significance to the Vietnamese struggle against the French. This was most prominent during the immediate postwar period.

Arranged chronologically, the present work is divided into six chapters that draw upon a large body of Vietnamese and Thai vernacular sources to detail the development of Vietnamese resistance work in Thailand during the period under study. The first chapter is divided into two time frames. The first part considers Thailand's importance to Vietnamese anticOLONIALISTS during the period between 1885 and 1925. Particular attention is paid to the extensive base building undertaken by scholar-patriots in Thailand in the early 1920s. The second section examines Vietnamese resistance programmes in Thailand in terms of their importance to the development of Vietnamese communism during the period between 1925 and 1940. Three major topics discussed in this section include: the role the Vietnamese played in the formation and leadership of the Siamese Communist Party, the part played by Vietnamese communists in promoting a Thai revolution via this Party, and the negative effects this had on Vietnamese resistance activities in Thailand.

The second chapter discusses two trends in Thai politics that worked in the Vietnamese favour during WWII. The first stemmed from international events and internal Thai political changes that saw Phibun Songkhram adopt sympathetic policies toward the Vietnamese in a bid to gain their support during the brief 1940-41 Franco-Thai border war. The second, and most important development, resulted from the direct cooperation which emerged between Viet Minh and Seri Thai resistance leaders at the end of the Pacific War. These wartime Seri Thai contacts proved to be invaluable to the Viet Minh in the postwar period, one of the major factors explaining the ability of the Vietnamese to administer a wide-range of programmes in Thailand after the war.

The last four chapters consider Thailand's unprecedented strategic importance to the Vietnamese in the immediate postwar period, with the discussion equally divided between
the period prior to the outbreak of full-scale war in Indochina in December 1946 and the interval running from that point to 1949. Beginning at the end of WWII, chapter three side-tracks momentarily to provide the reader with a basic understanding of the complex strategic situation facing the Vietnamese, as the French moved to retake Indochina after WWIII. Having done this, chapter four then shows how the Vietnamese responded to French actions in terms of expanding their military and diplomatic activities in Thailand during the same period. Chapter five focuses on the role played by Vietnamese representatives in Bangkok in the creation of the Southeast Asia League. This discussion serves as a vehicle to understanding better how Thailand became a key diplomatic outlet for the Hồ Chí Minh-led government following the outbreak of war in Indochina. The last chapter examines Thailand's military significance to the Vietnamese between 1947 and 1949. The first part of this chapter deals with the period prior to the November 1947 military coup in Bangkok, when the conditions for Vietnamese resistance operations were most favourable. The second section shows that while Phibun's return to power in 1948 changed the rules guiding the operation of Thai-based Vietnamese programmes, Thailand nonetheless remained a key link to the Vietnamese until 1949. In this year, Thailand's importance effectively came to an end as Phibun began to crack-down stringently on Vietnamese activities in Thailand and the victory of the Chinese Communists opened more important northern bases and provided the Vietnamese with key access to Chinese diplomatic and military support.
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## Abbreviations

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Australian Archives</td>
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<tr>
<td>BC</td>
<td>Bangkok Chronicle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BP</td>
<td>Bangkok Post</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BT</td>
<td>Bangkok Times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTWM</td>
<td>Bangkok Times Weekly Mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRS</td>
<td>Commonwealth Records Service (Australia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CVDCQ</td>
<td>Lê Mạnh Trinh, Cuộc Văn Động Cựu Quốc của Việt Kiều ở Thái Lan (1961)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEA</td>
<td>Department of External Affairs (Australia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOS</td>
<td>Department of State (United States)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLPH</td>
<td>Foreign Language Publishing House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FO</td>
<td>Foreign Office (Great Britain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRUS</td>
<td>Foreign Relations of the United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HHT</td>
<td>Hội Hợp Tác</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HVK</td>
<td>Hội Việt Kiều Thần Ái</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JIC</td>
<td>Joint Intelligence Committee (Great Britain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KCTT</td>
<td>Cuộc Kháng Chiến Thần Thành</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NB</td>
<td>Phan Bội Châu, Phan Bội Châu Niên Biểu (Hanoi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBPN</td>
<td>Nhà Xuất Phủ Núr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCLS</td>
<td>Nghiên Cứu Lịch Sử</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ndc.</td>
<td>no date cited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>npc.</td>
<td>no place (of publication) cited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NXB</td>
<td>Nhà Xuất Bản [publisher]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N XB</td>
<td>Nhà Xuất Bản Giáo Dục</td>
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<tr>
<td>N XBKH</td>
<td>Nhà Xuất Bản Khoa Học</td>
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A Note on Transliterations

In transliterating Thai names, titles, and places into English, I have used the Library of Congress system. However, because of the type of font I have used in my footnote text, I have had to omit some of the recommended diacritical marks, meaning that there is no distinction in the transliterations between long and short vowels and some infrequent diphthongs are not marked according to the Congress system. Secondly, in the cases where there are long-standing English spellings of certain Thai proper nouns, I have honoured that spelling in the text rather than reproduce it in an unfamiliar Library of Congress form.

As for Vietnamese transliterations, I have reproduced names, titles, and places in their original quốc ngữ (Vietnamese romanised script) spelling. The only exceptions to this have been such common words as "Hanoi," "Saigon," "Ho Chi Minh City," and "Viet Minh." Because these words appear so often in the text, rather than running the risk of distracting non-Vietnamese speaking readers with an excess of unfamiliar diacritic marks, I have left them in their English-written form.

Concerning English spelling, I have followed the British/Australian style throughout this thesis.
Map I
Indochina

China

VIETNAM

Hanoi

LAOS

THAILAND

Gulf of Thailand

Cambodia

Saigon

Bangkok

Phnom Penh

Mekong River

South China Sea

(xi)
Map II

Territories Ceded to France at the Turn of the Century
Map III

Vietnamese Resistance Bases in Siam, 1919-1925
Map IV

Post WWII Vietnamese Operations Along Thai—Cambodian Border
Map V

Strategic Situation in Indochina, 1949
Introduction

Ambassador Leonard Unger: I think that there is no question that over the years, say, four or five years, a particularly strong interest has been the permission that we were given for military reasons to use the bases in Thailand. . . . [I]t was primarily the use of the bases which made that area, that geography, of exceeding importance to us.

Now, this was not anything that raised a serious difficulty with the Thais, who were sympathetic with what we were trying to do at that time. But this did make Thailand and its geography in that sense of exceedingly great importance to the United States.

Senator Symington: Because we were in Vietnam?
Ambassador Unger: Because we were in Vietnam.¹

US Ambassador to Thailand, Leonard Unger, to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 1969

US officials attending Ambassador Unger's testimony to the Senate committee that day in 1969 would have been surprised to learn that in an address to cadres in Udon Thani about twenty years earlier, a special representative of the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) described Thailand's strategic significance to the Vietnamese in almost identical terms. Indeed, half a world away from this Senate hearing, many of the same Vietnamese leaders helping to direct the war effort against the US in the late 1960s would have understood very well what Unger meant when he referred to Thailand's "exceeding importance." Several of these Vietnamese had spent years building bases in Thailand during the resistance against the French. It must have been a grim, though not entirely surprising, irony to learn that many of the B-52s bombing Vietnam at the time were taking off from northeastern Thai airbases, many located in the same areas where the Vietnamese had set up resistance posts forty years earlier. Although the US took advantage of Thailand's geographical position in earnest in the 1960s, it was the Vietnamese who first recognised the favourable strategic location of Thailand in relation to Vietnam.

Surprisingly, this has been generally ignored in the existing scholarship on Thai-Vietnamese relations and in studies of the Vietnamese resistance against the French. While a number of scholars of Vietnam have contributed greatly to our understanding of

China's significance to the Vietnamese during this period, there has been no parallel, in depth examination of Vietnamese resistance activities in Thailand.

From the beginning of the direct French colonisation of Vietnam, Thailand had figured into the Vietnamese struggle against the French. The list of resistance leaders working from Thailand at one time or another during this period reads like a *Who's Who* in the Vietnamese anticolonial pantheon. Phan Đình Phùng, one of the first in this long line, singled Thailand out in the late 1880s as a possible sanctuary and a source of arms. While he did not know it at the time, these two interests remained major priorities throughout the course of Vietnamese resistance work in Thailand for the next six decades. The famous scholar-patriot, Phan Bội Châu, recognised this and made three trips to Thailand, including a year-long stay in the central part in 1910. Less known, however, is Đặng Thúc Húra, one of Châu's travelling companions who remained in Thailand for over twenty years building a network of bases among Vietnamese communities there. Benefiting from the work over which he presided were a number of young Vietnamese students who arrived in Thailand to study and work in the 1920s. Several of these youths went on to become famous revolutionaries and architects of the ICP. Even veteran leaders, such as Hồ Tùng Mậu and Hồ Chí Minh, spent considerable time in Thailand in the late 1920s strengthening resistance bases and training cadres. Following WWII, Thailand's importance increased even more as the French tried to retake their Indochinese colony after having lost it during the war. Younger partisans, such as Trần Văn Giầu, Nguyễn Đức Quy, and Hoàng Văn Hoan arrived in Thailand after the war to administer to an unprecedented level of Vietnamese diplomatic and military activities in Thailand.

To all these Vietnamese strategists mentioned above, Thailand's favourable geographical position in relation to Vietnam was foremost in their minds when working in Thailand. Shaped like a slim "S", narrow at the middle and slightly wider its ends, Vietnam runs south from China, sharing a long, hilly frontier with Laos before cradling its way west around Cambodia to the Gulf of Thailand. Because of this configuration, at

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3 A notable exception to this would be Thadeus Flood's short article, 'Vietnamese Refugees in Thailand: Minority Manipulation in Counter-insurgency,' *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 9, No. 3, (July-September 1977), pp. 31-47. Despite Flood's brief treatment of Vietnamese anticolonial activities in Thailand (which he points out in his opening), he nonetheless must be credited as one of the first scholars to bring to our attention the possible extent of Vietnamese anticolonial activities in Thailand in relation to the resistance against the French, making use of Thai and Vietnamese (in Chinese translation) primary sources.
almost any given point along the western border of that "S", the distance from that point to an opposite location on the eastern Thai border is relatively small. In fact, the present day northeastern Thai border is located a little over a 100 kilometres from northern central Vietnam. Until the Franco-Thai treaties at the turn of this century, this geographical proximity was all the more the case considering that the Thais held suzerainty over most of Laos and administered large parts of western Cambodia. This was also the case from May 1941 to December 1946 when the Thai border was expanded eastward to re-incorporate sizable portions of western Cambodia and smaller enclaves in Laos which had been forfeited to the French earlier. Although this geopolitical feature may seem obvious, it was a recurring theme which underpinned the importance of Thailand to the Vietnamese at almost every stage of the resistance against the French.

It is in this context that the present work sets out to trace the growth of Vietnamese resistance activities in Thailand from the time the French established direct colonial rule over Vietnam in 1885 to the Chinese Communist victory in 1949 and Bangkok's clampdown on Vietnamese activities in Thailand at about the same time. It is the aim of this thesis to show that although Thailand's importance to the Vietnamese resistance fluctuated at different times during this period, there was nonetheless an overall increase in its significance to the Vietnamese in the struggle against the French. Explaining Thailand's attractiveness throughout this period was a combination of its close proximity to Vietnam and simultaneous position outside direct French colonial control. Added to this were the overseas Vietnamese enclaves concentrated in northeast Thailand. These areas provided resistance leaders with strategically located, Vietnamese-speaking communities on which they could anchor their resistance work.

As a corollary, this thesis will also argue that there was a strategic equation between Vietnamese anticolonial programmes existed simultaneously in both countries, as a rule resistance work in China took long-term precedence over Vietnamese projects in Thailand. However, this was not the case when Vietnamese activities in China were suppressed and could no longer function effectively. During these times, most prominently in the late 1920s, early 1930s, and in the immediate post-WWII period, the centre of gravity of Vietnamese resistance work on the outskirts of Indochina shifted to Thailand. One of the main reasons for this inter-play was, once again, a matter of geography. Because the French could suppress Vietnamese resistance activities in Indochina effectively prior to WWII, Vietnamese leaders had to look abroad—beyond French Indochina—to find relatively safe, but still geographically close places to build rear bases. For those who looked to Japan for possible support, they were not only confronted by an ocean, but early on they were disappointed by Tokyo's refusal to allow Vietnamese anticolonial activities to be based from Japan. While Vietnamese revolutionaries later found support
in France and the Soviet Union, these were obviously not places near Vietnam where supply posts could be set up. To the south and east of Indochina was the South China Sea. This left only two options for Vietnamese strategists looking to build effective foreign bases just outside Indochina: go west to Thailand or north to China. They went both ways. Not surprisingly, activists in these two areas remained in contact with each other through a number of cadres who travelled between these two points. This linkage was a noteworthy component of the Vietnamese resistance against the French.

In addition, this thesis will also show that at key points in the resistance, Thai officialdom facilitated Vietnamese resistance activities in Thailand by permitting anticolonialists to administer their projects largely unimpeded. Although the degree of Thai support was informed by a need to maintain acceptable relations with the French and could vary according to domestic Thai political changes, Thai backing at these times ranged from turning a blind-eye to Vietnamese activities to large-scale support of their fight against the French.

Chapter 1 traces the growth of Vietnamese resistance activities in Siam from 1885 to the outbreak of WWII. Focusing on the 1885 to 1925 period, the first part of this chapter examines why Vietnamese anticolonialists paid any attention to Siam at all; discusses the wide network of resistance bases built by scholar-patriots in Thailand in the early 1920s; and identifies the major figures involved in this process and the events, both in Vietnam, Siam, and elsewhere, that informed their work. The second section of this chapter looks at how the success of this base building process in Siam by 1925 contributed to Thailand's emergence as an important rear area for Vietnamese revolutionary activities in the late 1920s and for the Vietnamese communists in the 1930s. A combination of deteriorating resistance conditions in southern China and increased French repression in Vietnam also made Thailand's significance all the greater during this period. Lastly, this chapter looks at the Vietnamese role in the formation of the Siamese Communist Party; the failure of this Party to promote a Siamese revolution; and how its attempts to do so negatively effected Vietnamese resistance organisations in Thailand and undermined their ability to aid the Vietnamese revolution from the west.

During this period, "Siam" (Prathet Sayam) was the term used to refer to what came to be called "Thailand" (Prathet Thai) in 1939. While there are several reasons for this name change, presided over by Phibun Songkhram and Wichit Wathakan, it was clearly linked to Bangkok's irredentist designs on Indochina in the late 1930s and was part of wider attempt to incorporate "Thai peoples" throughout the region into a larger national ("Thai") entity. Because this "Thailand" in 1939 was very different from its territorially smaller and less defined 19th century court-centred predecessor known as "Siam," it is important to make this distinction in the first chapter. For a discussion of Thai nationalism during this period, see: Scot Barmé, 'Luang Wichit Wathakan: Official Nationalism and Political Legitimacy Prior to World War II,' (MA Thesis, Australian National University, December 1989), pp. 4-9 and 111-33, as well as Preecha Junanamalaga, 'Thai or Siam?' Journal of the Siam Society, Vol. 36, Nos. 1 and 2, (March-June 1988), pp. 69-82. After WWII, Pridi Phanomyong changed the name of the country back to "Siam," only to see it changed yet again upon Phibun's second return to power in the late 1940s. Rather than run the risk of confusing the reader by trying to incorporate these changes into the text, I will, from chapter 2 (1939), use the term "Thailand." Nevertheless, readers should bear in mind the different meanings manifested in these two terms and their usage in Thai history.
Chapter 2 examines the WWII period and shows how two trends in Thai politics during this time contributed to a revitalisation of Vietnamese resistance programmes in Thailand. The first was a result of changing international events and internal Thai politics at the outset of WWII that saw Phibun Songkhram adopt sympathetic policies toward and relax strict regulations of the Vietnamese in Thailand in a bid to gain their support during the brief 1940-41 Franco-Thai border war. An even more important development came at the end of the Pacific War, when Viet Minh adherents in Thailand cooperated directly with their Seri Thai counterparts in anti-Japanese guerilla operations. The wartime link between the Viet Minh and the Seri Thai was a major factor explaining the rapid expansion of Vietnamese resistance activities in Thailand in the postwar period, especially as the Viet Minh's Seri Thai allies assumed ranking positions in postwar Thai politics.

Chapter 3 takes up the postwar period by briefly side-tracking from an exclusive discussion of Vietnamese resistance projects in Thailand to outline the complex strategic environment confronting the newly independent Vietnamese government in the immediate wake of WWII. Because French attempts to retake Indochina after the war directly informed Vietnamese operations in Thailand, this chapter reviews French diplomatic and military actions in Indochina during the last half of 1945 and the events leading up to the outbreak of full-scale war in Indochina in December 1946. Chapter 4 examines how the Vietnamese responded to these French moves in terms of strengthening their position in Thailand through the procurement and transportation of arms back to Vietnam, the expansion of military activities from Thailand, the building of closer cooperation with the Lao and Cambodian resistance groups operating there, and through increased diplomatic activity. In chapter 5, we will explore in greater detail the diplomatic value of Thailand by examining the leading role played by Hồ Chí Minh's Bangkok-based officials in the creation of the Southeast Asia League.

In our final chapter, we take the story up to the victory of the Chinese Communist in 1949, an event which effectively ended Thailand's importance to the Vietnamese fight against the French. In the first part of this chapter, we refocus on the military and strategic significance of Thailand to Vietnam in the period between the outbreak of full-scale war in Indochina in December 1946 and the November 1947 military coup d'état in Bangkok. In the second part of this chapter, we see that the November coup changed the terms defining the administration of Vietnamese resistance operations in Thailand. To deal with these changing circumstances, in mid-1948 the ICP dispatched a special representative to Thailand to reorganise the leadership and administration of resistance activities there. With full access to bases in southern China still over a year away and because Thai suppression of the Vietnamese was not yet that severe, Thailand continued to serve as a key diplomatic and military link to the Vietnamese. By 1949, however, a combination of the Chinese Communist victory and Phibun's increased suppression of
the Vietnamese in Thailand saw the priorities of Vietnamese resistance activities on the outskirts of Indochina switched abruptly from Thailand to China. While small-scale projects continued in Thailand during the 1950s, our story will end with the Chinese Communist victory. From that point, Thailand's importance was rendered insignificant by comparison to the access the Vietnamese now had to rear bases and aid from Mao Zedong's China, a factor which made a major contribution to the Vietnamese defeat of the French at Điện Biên Phủ in 1954.

A Note on Sources

In preparing this study, I have tried to draw upon a large corpus of Vietnamese and, to a lesser degree, Thai vernacular sources. During a year-long stay in Vietnam in 1988-1989, I was fortunate enough to interview the former President of the DRV delegation in Bangkok (1946-1950), the late Nguyễn Đức Quý; the former head of the People's Committee of the South in September 1945 and one of the Viet Minh's post-WWII representatives stationed in Thailand, Trần Văn Giàu; and Hoàng Nhật Tân, a Viet Minh adherent who worked in Thailand after WWII and the son of former veteran Communist Party member and longtime activist in Thailand, Hoàng Văn Hoan. In Washington, D.C., I was able to interview a former Viet Minh military official who also worked in Thailand in the late 1940s, Trần Văn Dinh.

Because of the time restrictions of this degree, it was impossible to conduct research at all the major sites containing documents relating to the subject at hand. Thus, in an effort to make the best use of both the large body of untapped Vietnamese published sources and the interviews I conducted in Vietnam, I have focused the present work on the Vietnamese view of the importance of Thailand during the long struggle against French colonialism. A number of important Thai and Lao (in Thai translation) sources have helped me to avoid relying too heavily on the Vietnamese side. In addition, I have made every attempt to cross-check these sources with published works which have drawn upon French archival documents relevant to this thesis topic. It must be mentioned that this is not a study of Thai-Vietnamese relations, the Vietnamese minority in Thailand, or a history of Thai policy towards Vietnamese immigration. I discuss these subjects in the text only in so far as they influenced Vietnamese strategic interests in Thailand.

Methodologically, there have been some problems in the use of sources which must be brought to the reader's attention. In chapter 1, in particular, I have had to rely heavily on memoir sources. This can be a danger, for oftentimes those writing their memoirs do so decades later and may not always recall the complexity or order of events as they actually occurred at the time. In addition, there is a tendency to omit certain events which the writer may want to downplay for personal or political reasons and, on the other hand, to overstate the historical importance of certain events in which the writer was involved. In addition, because the majority of the memoirs cited in chapter 1 were written by Vietnamese communist cadres who worked in Thailand for decades, there is a clear political bias that must be taken into account. Throughout this study, I have made every effort to use these sources critically, cross-checking them wherever possible with other accounts. However, the fact remains that this collection of memoirs represents the bulk of the source material presently available to historians studying the inner-workings of the Vietnamese resistance in Thailand prior to WWII. Both communist and non-communist interviewees have helped fill in some gaps which the published accounts did not mention. Of particular value has been the recently published memoir outside of Vietnam of Hoàng Văn Hoan, Giot Nước trong Biển Cả (Hồi Ký Cách Mạng), [A Drop in the Ocean (A Memoir of Revolution)]. Hoan defected to China in 1979, after serving as a former Vietnamese Communist Politburo member, the first DRV ambassador to China, and a longtime communist cadre who had held ranking positions in Vietnamese revolutionary organisations in Thailand in the late 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. Albeit a memoir by a former Vietnamese communist leader, Giot Nước gives an inside account of Vietnamese revolutionary organisations in Thailand that goes far beyond any work published in Vietnam discussing the same topic. Thus, this is an important source against which we can compare other accounts.

Secondly, it must be pointed out that while the sources available for a discussion of Vietnamese resistance work between 1947 and 1949 are sufficient to sketch in the major developments in chapter 6, they are inadequate to provide a comprehensive, detailed examination of the period. For example, a lack of information has made it very difficult to document Vietnam's relations with the Cambodian and Lao resistance groups operating from Thailand between 1947 and 1949. Although Hoàng Văn Hoan deducts a considerable portion of his memoir to describing his role in both reorganising Vietnam's relations with its Lao and Cambodian counterparts and revamping Vietnamese resistance work in Thailand in 1948 and 1949, published Vietnamese communist sources are silent when it comes to discussing Vietnamese activities in Thailand during this time. Moreover, interviewees were less than forthcoming in discussing breaks which occurred within the Vietnamese leadership in Thailand during this period. While I present the notable resistance developments that Hoan says occurred in Thailand during this time,
trying always to cross-check his version with those of interviewees, I am not prepared to rely only on Hoan for a complete accounting of this period. However, based upon my research and conversations with some of those Vietnamese who worked in Thailand after WWII, I will conjecture as to some possible reasons why there was a break within the Vietnamese leadership in Thailand in the postwar period.

Thirdly, some may object in certain sections of this work to my reliance on interviews of Vietnamese individuals who worked in Thailand during the period under study. This is a valid criticism, for it is certainly true that when people recount historical events in which they were directly involved to a number of interviewers, their recollections tend to be altered each time. However, in an area where very little research has been done, few works published, and access to Vietnamese archives limited, the accounts of those interviewed provide us with an important source of information heretofore unavailable. In addition, I was encouraged by the fact that those I interviewed in Vietnam appeared surprised that I was interested in learning more of their activities in Thailand, suggesting, perhaps, that they had not been interviewed by others about their work in Thailand until I showed up on their doorstep. Because the interviewees provided so much new material related to the topic at hand, I have drawn considerably from their accounts in certain parts of this work in the hope that this information will at least stimulate further research and benefit others working on related topics.

In view of the fact that very little research has been done on this subject, I have been acutely aware of the need to provide readers with a solid factual basis. As a result, much of this thesis is descriptive, concerned with incorporating a large body of new source material into the text that follows. Although I have tried to point out trends and recurrent themes wherever possible, I have had to leave the more interesting theoretical questions to others. It is my hope that they will be able to draw upon new material found herein and elsewhere to provide us with a better understanding of this topic.
Chapter 1

Crossing the Mekong

A hard rain fell as the funeral procession moved slowly along the road toward Ban Chik. Five-hundred Vietnamese, a collection of former students, Party cadres, and overseas nationals, solemnly accompanied the body of Đặng Thúc Héra to the overseas Vietnamese cemetery in this remote village, located just outside of the northeastern Siamese town of Udon Thani. The date was February 1931. Twenty-two years earlier, this Vietnamese scholar-patriot had left his native birthplace of Nghệ An province to work with the famous anticolonialist, Phan Bội Châu. Arriving in Siam in 1909, he dedicated the rest of his life to training youths and building bases among the overseas Vietnamese communities there. Despite harsh living conditions and ever present French spies, Héra saw his work among the Vietnamese in Siam as part of a long-term plan by which durable rear bases could be provided for the Vietnamese resistance against the French. As he was fond of reminding his students in Siam in the 1920s: "When the revolution is being built up, its leadership must be abroad; but when the revolutionary movement breaks out, the leadership must be inside the country."2

While Héra never returned to his native homeland, his long work in Siam laid the foundation for what became important rear areas for the Vietnamese resistance over the next three decades. He played a key part in bringing youths out of Vietnam to study and

1 The account of Héra's funeral comes from a collaborative article written by one of his close confidants in Siam, Nguyễn Tài [who witnessed Héra's death] and Hoàng Trọng Thực, 'Đặng Thúc Héra: Một Tâm Gương Yêu Quốc Bên Biệt Khưu' [Đặng Thúc Héra: An Unshakeable Patriotic Model], Nghĩa Cự Lịch Sử [Historical Research; hereafter, cited as NCLS], No. 76, (July 1965), p. 59 [this article will hereafter be referred to as 'Một Tâm Gương']; Nguyễn Tài's memoir, 'Mấy Chuyện Về Cự Đặng-Thúc-Héra' [Stories about Elder Đặng Thúc Héra], NCLS, No. 79, (November 1965), p. 46 [Hereafter, cited as 'Mấy Chuyện']; and a biography of Quyên Anh (Héra's younger cousin) by Sơn Tùng, Con Ngợi I và Con Dòng [The People and the Way], (Hanoi: NXBPN, 1976), pp. 129-30. 'Mấy Chuyện' consists of five historical recollections recorded by Tài of Héra's activities in Siam as recounted to him by Héra in the late 1920s. Hoàng Trọng Thực is the pen name of Hoàng Nhật Tấn, the son of the former veteran Communist Party leader and long-time activist in Siam, Hoàng Văn Hoàn. Interview with Hoàng Nhật Tấn, 5 May 1989, Hanoi. Quyên Anh spent forty years working in Siam, first as an adherent of the early Vietnamese anticolonialist movement and later as an ICP member. She actually worked with Héra from 1913 until his death in 1931, and thus provides us with an important firsthand account of Vietnamese activities in Siam during the early years.

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he provided shelter to resistance leaders coming from China and Vietnam. Crossing the Mekong to build upon Húra's work in Siam in the late 1920s were a number of the future leaders of the Vietnamese revolution, including Hồ Chí Minh himself.

In this chapter, Húra will serve as our springboard into a wider discussion of Vietnamese anticolonial activities in Siam during the height of French colonialism in Indochina (1885-1940). Although Húra's influence over the direction of Vietnamese programmes in Siam diminished by the late 1920s, the fruits of his work continued to benefit the next generation of resistance leaders working in Siam, the Vietnamese communists. Following the break between the Chinese Nationalists and Communists in 1927, major Vietnamese activists in southern China shifted their attention to the more favourable conditions available in northeastern Siam. Over the course of the next three years, Siam became an important rearbase and laboratory for Vietnamese revolutionaries, with Hồ Chí Minh working there and presiding over the formation of the Siamese Communist Party in 1930. As we shall see, this Party had the dual tasks of promoting a revolution among the Siamese masses and aiding the Vietnamese resistance from bases situated along the Siamese side of the Mekong River. In many respects, the communists had Húra to thank for their ability to assist the Vietnamese revolution from Siam during the turbulent years of the early 1930s, for the bases from which they worked were the same ones Húra had put together a decade earlier.

Part I: Siam and the Vietnamese Anticolonial Movement

1.1. Vietnamese Immigration to Siam

If Húra were to tell us why he dedicated so much of his life to working in Siam, he would probably begin with a discussion of Siam's large overseas Vietnamese population. Vietnamese immigrants first began arriving in Siam in large numbers during the late 18th century in order to escape social and political dislocation in Vietnam. The earliest wave, often referred to by the Siamese as the "old Vietnamese," came at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th. The majority were southerners and Catholics who, in the midst of civil unrest during the Tay Sơn rebellion (1771-1802), followed or were forcibly moved by Nguyễn Ánh to Siam where Rama I (r. 1782-1809) allowed them to live in Lopburi and areas which now constitute the greater Bangkok metropolitan area, such as Samsen and Bangpho. In 1802, with the help of troops supplied by Rama I, Nguyễn Ánh broke the Tay-son leaders' hold on Vietnam, unified the country, and proclaimed himself Emperor of Vietnam under the title of Gia Long (r. 1802-1820).

While Siamese troops went to Vietnam on Ánh's behalf, a large number of Ánh's Vietnamese troops who had accompanied him to Siam earlier preferred to remain there in the service of the Siamese King.\(^4\) Other Vietnamese immigrants stayed to take up jobs as traders, doctors, lawyers, bureaucrats, and many married Siamese.\(^5\) Eventually, through inter-marriage and assimilation, the sons and daughters of these immigrants lost much of their identification with what it meant to be Vietnamese, preferring instead to adopt the local customs and languages prevalent in the areas in which they resided in Siam.\(^6\)

With Vietnam unified, another group of Vietnamese newcomers trickled into Siamese territories during the mid-19th century as the Siamese and Vietnamese courts resumed their long-standing rivalry for influence over Cambodia. Between the 1830s and 1850s, these arrivals included prisoners-of-war captured by Siamese armies in Cambodia and southern Vietnam.\(^7\) Joining this group were refugees who fled anti-Christian persecutions in Vietnam under Emperors Minh Mạng (r. 1820-1841), Thiệu Trị (r. 1841-1847), and Tự Đức (r. 1848-1883). Led by French priests more often than not, these Vietnamese were concentrated in southeastern coastal towns, mainly Trat and Chanthaburi.\(^8\) Over time, some families made their way into central Siam, locating along the Chao Phraya river in towns such as Paknampho (Nakhon Sawan).\(^9\)

A larger intake of Vietnamese occurred because of stipulations in the 1893 Franco-Siamese Treaty. In the early 1890s, the French were working to force King Chulalongkorn (r. 1868-1910) to part with his claims over Cambodian and Lao territories. The Siamese, fearing a fate similar to Vietnam's, seriously considered fighting the French for control of the territories, but in the end did not have the wherewithal to undertake such action. Following a naval clash with the French at the

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5 'Một Tấm Gương,' p. 54; CVDCQ, p. 14; and Túng Lâm, Cựu Đổi Cách Mạng Cường Đô [The Revolutionary Life of Cương Đô]. (Saigon: Tôn Thất Lạc, 1957), p. 28.

6 'Một Tấm Gương,' p. 54 and Túng Lâm, op. cit., pp. 26 and 28. It would not be entirely correct to say that these Vietnamese learned Siamese. There were a variety of ethnic groups living in the frontier regions of northeastern Siam during this period, with Lao and Khmer being two languages widely spoken besides Siamese.


9 Flood, op. cit., p. 32 and Georges Bourdarel, trans., 'Memoires de Phan Boi Chau,' France-Asie, Vol. 22, Nos. 3-4, (1968), p. 117, fn. 120. This is a French translation of Phan Bội Châu's Niên Biên [Chronicles], the quêc ngôt version.
mouth of the Chao Phraya River in 1893 (more commonly referred to as the "Paknam Incident"), the court acquiesced to certain French territorial demands. Under the terms of the October 1893 Franco-Siamese Treaty, the court relinquished claims to most of Laos east of the Mekong River. About a decade later, the Lao enclaves of Luang Prabang and Pakse were turned over to the French in another treaty, followed by yet a third treaty in 1907 in which claims to the rice-rich provinces of Battambang, Siemreap, and Sisiphon in Cambodia were forfeited to the French. As for Vietnamese immigration to Siam, the 1893 treaty allowed the French to occupy the southeastern Siamese port town of Chanthaburi pending implementation of the treaty. During the French administration of this town, a large number of Vietnamese were brought in to fill bureaucratic positions. After Chanthaburi was returned to the Siamese in 1903, many of these Vietnamese chose to remain there with the permission of Siamese authorities. In another clause of the 1893 treaty, Vietnamese, Lao, and Cambodians were given the status of "French subjects," and thus were able to travel freely within twenty-five kilometres of the Siamese border. Changes were also made to allow these individuals to reside and work in Siam, with the only requirement being a poll tax of four baht each year. Because of these privileges and the better employment opportunities sometimes available in Siam, a large, though undetermined, number of Vietnamese from Laos crossed into northeast Siam at the turn of the century.10

Another related wave of immigration to Siam occurred in response to the French colonial expansion into Vietnam. According to Vietnamese sources, this group consisted of several thousand families, located mostly in the northeastern provinces of Nong Khai, Nakhon Phanom, Udon Thani, Sakonnakhon, and Ubon Ratchathani.11 Many of these families, as we shall see, were led from northern central Vietnam to Siam by Vietnamese anticolonialists who failed to block French military advances.12 The majority were from Nghệ-Tĩnh provinces and settled either in the Bangkok area or in the northeast at the turn of the century.13 Of those in the northeast, many were farmers who supplied urban centres throughout the region with vegetables and pork. Others became barbers, carpenters, bricklayers, or construction workers. Some of the earliest roads linking districts in northeast Siam were built partly by the hands of overseas Vietnamese.14 Added to this group were those who continued to be attracted to French-led Catholic communities in northeastern Siam, such as Tha Hae, a small village near the Mekong River, and Tha Bo, another village with a large Vietnamese population across

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10 Battye, op. cit., p. 365; CVDCQ, pp. 14-15; and Mốt Tâm Guroń, p. 54. During this time, one Siamese Baht was equivalent to seven or eight French Indochinese piastres.
11 'Mây Chuyên,' p. 30 and Mót Tâm Guroń, p. 54.
12 Đào Trinh Nhát, Lương Êc Quyền, p. 42 and Mây Chuyên,' p. 30.
13 Tung Läm, op. cit., p. 26 and Mây Chuyên,' p. 30. According to Prince Cưrong Dé, there were around fifteen thousand Vietnamese living in the Bangkok area. See: Tung Läm, op. cit., p. 28. I have been unable to confirm this, but it seems much too high a number.
14 CVDCQ, p. 15 and Mót Tâm Guroń, p. 54.
from Vientiane. By the outbreak of WWII, the number of Vietnamese living in Siam numbered somewhere between twenty to thirty thousand, with the majority concentrated in the northeast.

I.2. The Cân Vương Movement and Siam

The brittle state of Vietnamese society and politics during the 19th century left Vietnam vulnerable to superior French firepower. Encouraged by dreams of wealth in southern China and given a pretext for intervention because of Huế’s persecutions of French Catholic missionaries, the French began to seize territory in Vietnam in the 1850s, capturing Saigon in 1859 and establishing protectorates in southern Vietnam and Cambodia by 1863. By 1885, the French had established a protectorate over all of Vietnam and reached an agreement with China whereby the Ch'ing court agreed to end its tributary relationship with Vietnam, pull its troops out of northern Vietnam, and end its support of the Vietnamese resistance. The Vietnamese monarchy was subsequently subordinated to a French governor-general, colonial administration of Vietnam was expanded, and monopolies in salt, alcohol, and opium were soon implemented.

With the Chinese out of the way, the French turned their attention to destroying Vietnamese resistance. Attacks were launched in northern Vietnam and in 1885 the young emperor, Ham Nghi, fled to the countryside where a number of scholar-patriots were gathering to fight the French. In that same year, the Cân Vương (Save the King) Edict was proclaimed, calling for resistance against the French and appealing to scholars, in particular, to lead this fight. Some Vietnamese mandarins chose collaboration, while others resigned their positions in the bureaucracy and returned to their native villages. Yet there were those who resisted. And of these many took to mountainous regions in northern central Vietnam, setting up bases in remote jungle areas, particularly in western Nghệ-Tĩnh provinces. It was from this area, a little over 100 kilometres from the present day northeastern Thai border, that early resistance fighters first began to take note of the possible importance of Siam in the struggle against the French.

While many of these scholars had grown up in an era when the court in Huế viewed its Siamese counterpart as an adversary vying for influence over Cambodia and Laos, the French colonisation of what became known as "Indochina" fundamentally changed the pre-colonial relationship between these two. Under French rule, Vietnam ceased to be a regional power competing with the Siamese court; instead, the French now posed the

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15 Poole, op. cit., p. 28; CVDCQ, pp. 14-15; 'Một Tâm Gương,' p. 54; and Battye, op. cit., p. 365.
16 Poole, op. cit., p. 30 and 'Mây Chuyên,' p. 30. Nguyễn Tài says that Hira told him in the late 1920s that in reality the Vietnamese population in Siam did not reach thirty thousand. See: 'Mây Chuyên,' p. 30.
unprecedented threat to Bangkok. As Vietnamese scholar-patriots were launching hit-and-run attacks on colonial troops in the early 1890s, the French were moving westward into Siamese vassals, pressuring Bangkok to forfeit its claims to these territories. In the end, by taking vast territories claimed by the Siamese monarchy in Laos and Cambodia at the turn of the century, the French left Siamese leaders bitter and, as we shall see, they unwittingly fostered a new view of the Vietnamese resistance movement on the part of Siamese elites that would persist well into the 20th century.

Although it is true that the first generation of Vietnamese anticolonialists, those of the Cân Vươn movement, never really developed strong bases in or garnered much support from Siam, they nevertheless recognised that Siamese leaders could be possible allies and arms suppliers and that the loose nature of Siam's eastern frontier could act as a potential sanctuary from French attacks. The scholar-patriot, Phan Đình Phùng (1847-1896), was one of the first Vietnamese anticolonial leaders to single out the importance of Siam as a possible source of support against the French. A native of Hà Tĩnh province and a leading figure in the Cân Vươn movement, Phùng left the Nguyễn court in the 1880s to fight the French out of mountain bases in Nghệ-Tĩnh. However, Phùng quickly realised that to engage the French, weapons and equipment had to be procured, a factor which forced the Cân Vươn movement's leaders to look abroad for assistance. With the French in control of most of Indochina, Phùng's main choices came down to the two peripheral countries outside French colonial rule: China and Siam. No doubt many scholar-patriot leaders felt more at home in the Confucian world of China than in the more alien, Buddhist-Indic culture of Siam. Nonetheless, as Phùng explained to his followers, because of China's own problems with the West, the Vietnamese could no longer rely on the Ch'ing court for support. Remembering a sister of Gia Long who had married Rama I, he suggested that the Siamese court might be an alternative source of aid.18

To this end, Phùng entrusted reliable cadres to make the journey to Siam to negotiate the purchase of weapons and equipment.19 A secret route, linking Cân Vươn bases in Nghệ-Tĩnh to Siam via Laos, was established to take these arms back to Vietnam.20

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19 Ibid., pp. 89, 134, and 159; Miệt Tâm Gương, p. 59; and Phạm Văn Sơn, Việt-Nam Cách Mạng Cân Sỹ (1885-1914) [The History of the Modern Vietnamese Revolution (1885-1914)], (Saigon: Nhà Sách Khai- Trí, 1963), p. 147.
20 Đào Trịnh Nhạt, Phan Đình Phùng, pp. 129 and 134; Sơn Tùng, op. cit., p. 27; and Trần Huy Liệu, Văn Tao, and Nguyễn Khắc Đàm. Tài Liệu Thám Khảo Lịch Sử Cách Mạng Cân Đủ Việt Nam, Khôi Nghĩa Yến- Thế Khởi Nghĩa Của Các Đan Tộc Miền Núi, Tập I [Research Materials on the History of the Modern Vietnamese Revolution: The Yến Thế Uprising and Those of the Upland Minorities, Volume I], (4th edition; Hanoi: NXBVSD, 1957), p. 127. One known route to Siam originated from the mountains of Vụ Quang in northwestern Vietnam. David Marr has shown that during this period a Vietnamese command headquarters was in operation in Vụ Quang. Marr, op. cit., p. 64. This link to Siam may have been formed around 1888, for Quỳnh Anh says that her father, a scholar who took up arms against the
Although Phùng reportedly spent some time in Siam himself, it seems that a young woman by the name of Cô Tám was one of his chief arms buyers in Siam. Tám did much of her buying in Tha Uthen (a district in the present day northeastern province of Nakhon Phanom) which soon became a refuge for patriots fleeing Vietnam during this early period of the resistance. In the end, though, it appears that the quantity of arms provided by Tám was limited to a total of four or five shipments which ended when she mysteriously disappeared in the Lao jungle.

Siamese military forces also lent a hand to Cân Vương forces working out of the mountainous regions of northwestern Vietnam, such as Hướng Sơn, Vũ Quang, and Điện Biên Phủ, in the late 1880s. According to one Vietnamese source, during armed altercations with French units around Hướng Sơn in 1885 and 1886, Phùng's adherents were "cooperating and coordinating their activities closely" with Siamese military forces against the French. It will be remembered that the Siamese court still considered most of present day Laos and parts of western Cambodia to be under its suzerainty prior to October 1893. A recent study has shown that King Chulalongkorn, worried about French designs on Black Tai areas in northwestern Tonkin, dispatched a military expedition to the area between 1885 and 1887 to bring order to his Lao tributaries and among the Tai-speaking peoples in Sipsongchuthai. In late 1885, this Siamese military force crossed the present day border between Laos and northwestern Vietnam into the plains of Điện Biên Phủ as the French were moving towards Sơn La and Lai Châu. Siamese military commanders were thus in a position to contact Cân Vương leaders who had set up base in nearby areas and shared the Siamese desire to prevent French colonial expansion westward. In one instance, a Siamese military contingent and Phùng's forces were reported to have engaged French forces at the Ai Lao (Lao) pass and Quy Hợp in northwestern Tonkin, as well as to have driven an undetermined French force out of the present day northeastern Thai border town of Khemmarat. In another instance, a Vietnamese resistance leader drew upon the anti-French views of Siamese General Phaya Suris, stationed in the Điện Biên Phủ area, to gain assistance against the French. This cooperation was further augmented by the Siamese military's willingness to help Cân

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21 Flood, op. cit., p. 32.
23 CVDCQ, p. 9 and Dạo Trịnh Nhữ, Phan Đình Phùng, p. 167.
26 Phạm Văn Sơn, op. cit., pp. 211, 321, and 327. The Vietnamese anticolonialist whom the Siamese aided was Điều Văn Trì.
Vương leaders in the matter of purchasing arms.\textsuperscript{27} When Phùng's death in 1896 brought an effective end to the Cành Vương movement, Siam was seen as a natural sanctuary for a number of his followers who had been overpowered by the French.\textsuperscript{28}

I.3. Phan Bội Châu Travels to Siam (1908-1911)

Siam continued to figure in the resistance activities of the next generation of anticolonial leaders. Chief among these was Phan Bội Châu (1867-1940). A native of Nghệ-An province, Châu grew up in the midst of the French colonisation of Vietnam and saw the Cành Vương movement crushed. Steeped in a classical Confucian education, Châu, perhaps more than any other figure of his time, realised that the survival of Vietnam itself was at stake under the French.

In 1904, Châu and other anti-colonialists formed the \textit{Duy Tân Hội} (Reformation Association). Like the Cành Vương movement before it, this organisation sought to re-establish Vietnam's independence and drive out the French. Châu was appointed to travel abroad to solicit foreign assistance. Impressed by Japan's growing military and economic might, Châu went there to seek aid for the resistance movement against the French. While the Japanese allowed Vietnamese students to study there, after a short time it became clear that Japan's relations with France took precedence over supporting the Vietnamese resistance. In 1909, two years after Japan recognised France's "territorial rights" in Asia, Châu and many of his students were forced to leave Japan. In the face of deportation, Châu wrote in his memoir decades later that he "had to focus on two countries: China and Siam," the same two countries Phan Đình Phùng had considered a generation earlier in terms of possible sources of foreign assistance.\textsuperscript{29}

Encouraging Châu's interest in Siam were King Chulalongkorn's travels to Europe and his personal interest in Siamese-Vietnamese relations, which, Châu wrote, Chulalongkorn "considered to be as close as lips and teeth."\textsuperscript{30} In mid-1908, shortly after the Siamese court had been forced by the French to relinquish claims to Cambodian territories, Châu arrived in Bangkok for the first time. With the help of a Japanese legal adviser to the Siamese government, a meeting was arranged between Châu and Chulalongkorn, who was reported to have been happy to meet the scholar-patriot. Châu claims in his memoir that he subsequently received support from ranking officials in the

\textsuperscript{27} CVDCQ, p. 9. The quantity of arms donated or sold to the Vietnamese resistance remains unknown, but it was probably limited.

\textsuperscript{28} Some of those to go into exile in Siam were: Dề Đạt, Linh Mục, and Ngô Quảng (Thấn Sơn). See: Phạm Văn Sơn, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 167; 'Một Tàm Gươm,' p. 59; Sơn Tùng, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 55; and CVDCQ, p. 9.

\textsuperscript{29} Phan Bội Châu, \textit{Niên Biểu, t scour "Ty Phê Phân" [A Chronicle or "A Self-Criticism"], Translated into Vietnamese from Chinese by Tôn Quang Phいただいて and Phăm Trọng Điệm, (Hanoi: NXBVSD, 1957), p. 124 for the quote [Hereafter, cited as NB]. Shortly after Châu's group was required to leave Japan, the Duy Tân identified six areas which deserved further attention. Listed among these was the need to make contact with the Siamese government. NB, p. 99.

\textsuperscript{30} NB, p. 125.
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including the backing of a Siamese prince (an uncle of the King) who agreed to Châu's proposal allowing for his students from Japan to reside in Siam.\textsuperscript{31} Although the arrival of the Vietnamese students in Siam was temporarily delayed by developments in Vietnam and Châu's return to Hong Kong, Châu says that his trip "marked the beginning of contact with Siam."\textsuperscript{32}

In March 1909, Dãng Thúc Héra arrived in Hong Kong with 2,500 piastres for Châu and informed him of armed uprisings in Vietnam and the need for more weapons if these efforts were to be effective.\textsuperscript{33} Châu sent Héra and another anticolonialist, Dãng Tür Kinh, to Japan to buy arms. These two men purchased rifles and brought them back to Hong Kong for storage until a way could be determined to transport them back to Vietnam. Trying the China route first, Châu found the shipping costs charged by Chinese merchants prohibitive, and thus left with Héra in mid-1909 bound for Siam. Back in Bangkok after a brief stopover in Singapore in June, Châu held discussions with the King's uncle, who agreed to provide a boat to Châu to transport the Hong Kong-based weapons back to Vietnam. However, this plan fell through when the Siamese Minister of Foreign Affairs "strongly opposed" this support on the grounds that it would disrupt Franco-Siamese relations.\textsuperscript{34} Châu returned to Hong Kong empty handed, donated the arms to Sun Yat-sen's representatives, and travelled back to Bangkok in September 1910.\textsuperscript{35}

In Bangkok for the third time, Châu met with the King's uncle again, explaining the situation in Vietnam and expressing the hope that the "Siamese government would secretly support" the Vietnamese resistance.\textsuperscript{36} The Prince reportedly agreed to this and, to this end, put Châu in touch with his brother, a Major General in the Siamese infantry. According to Châu's account, the general agreed to his plan for the formation of a farming camp which would be self-sustaining and would provide a refuge to those students deported from Japan. The general also approved a plan whereby an appointed Vietnamese representative would be allotted funds by the Siamese of five baht per month.\textsuperscript{37} The government arranged for Châu and his supporters to reside in Ban Tham, a village in a fertile agricultural area apparently located on the Menam River in central

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{31} According to Châu, the decision to allow the Vietnamese to reside in Siam was done according to the wishes of Chulalongkorn. See: NB, p. 125. French historian, Georges Bourdarel, has suggested that the uncle of the King to whom Châu is referring may have been Bhanurangsri (1860-1928), who was then Minister of Defence. Georges Bourdarel, op. cit., p. 118, fn.
\item \textsuperscript{32} NB, p. 126.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Môt Tâm Gương, p. 53 and NB, pp. 126-28.
\item \textsuperscript{34} NB, p. 128. This was most probably Prince Devawongse [Dewawong], the Minister of Foreign Affairs. According to Curém De, the Siamese court agreed to transport the Vietnamese arms to Vietnam under the misconception that Japan was aiding the Vietnamese resistance. When Bangkok learned that the Japanese had actually deported Châu, they reversed their decision. The Siamese felt that they could not support the Vietnamese unless the Japanese did. Tùng Lâm, op. cit., p. 45.
\item \textsuperscript{35} NB, pp. 127-28 and 135-36. See also: "Môt Tâm Gương," p. 53.
\item \textsuperscript{36} NB, p. 136.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Ibid., pp. 136-37.
\end{itemize}
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Siam, a six day walk from Bangkok. The General also supplied the Vietnamese with the necessary farming tools to get started, while Siamese regional authorities gave Châu’s group written permission to cultivate the land. In the meantime, Châu continued to ship small arms caches to Vietnam from Siam.

Ban Tham was a unique experiment. For one of the first times, Vietnamese scholars were engaged in the difficult work of tilling the land, planting crops, and making a living by the fruits of their own labour, no different from the surrounding peasant communities. By 1911, approximately fifty Japanese-deported Vietnamese students were planting paddy in Ban Tham. Joining them were older patriots, remnants of the Phan Đình Phùng era. Farming camps were set up, whereby members worked together in the planting and harvesting of crops and shared profits derived from their work. The Ban Tham community also raised its own pigs, chickens, and built its own homes. In certain ways, Ban Tham was not only a sanctuary for intrepid anticolonialists, but it also served as a rudimentary re-training camp, bringing Confucian-trained scholars into closer contact with the living conditions of the common peasant.

For Châu, the “Ban Tham experience" also offered him the chance to reflect on the previous decade and to put pen to paper. It was in Siam that he made some of his first efforts to employ popular Vietnamese literary forms rather than the elite Chinese ones which were largely inaccessible to the Vietnamese common man. While Châu did not write in quoc ngữ (the romanised Vietnamese script), he did experiment with such Vietnamese styles as tuồng (Vietnamese drama), chèo (traditional operetta), and thơ bốn chữ (a Vietnamese poetic form). Châu also wrote three important poems in Siam—namely, Ca Ái Đöan (Love of Community Ballad), Ca Ái Chúng (Love of Race Ballad), and Ca Ái Quôc (Patriotic Ballad). These poems were translated into quóc

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38 Sources for the discussion of Ban Tham come from the following: CVDCQ, p. 19; NB, pp. 135-40; 'Một Tâm Gương,' p. 53; and Lê Trọng Khâm and Dương Huy Văn, 'Cuộc Khự Nghĩa Của Việt Nam Quang Phúc Hồi Đảy Miền Nam Trung Bộ Năm 1916' [The Uprising of the Vietnamese Restoration Association in Southern Central Vietnam in 1916], NCLS, No. 22, (January 1961), p. 34, fn. 4. The main leaders at Ban Tham were: Đặng Đức Kính, Hồ Văn Long, Lê Hồng Chung, Ngô Quang (Than Sơn), and Đặng Thúc Hào. Đặng Đức Kính was the uncle of the scholar-patriot, Đặng Thái Thân. I have been unable to locate Ban Tham on any map. Considering (as we shall see) that new camps were soon opened in Paknampho and Ban Dong, Ban Tham was possibly located somewhere nearby in Nakhon Sawan or Phichit provinces.

39 NB, p. 113. At this time, Siam was one of the best ways of getting arms to patriots in Nghệ-Tĩnh provinces. See: Tùng Lâm, op. cit., p. 45.

40 Mộ Tâm Gương,' p. 53. In 1910, Prince Cửu Long Đệ arrived in Siam where he resided for a few months. Unlike the others, he stayed in the Bangkok area with a wealthy overseas Vietnamese named Mênn Lâ and reportedly had many contacts within the Siamese royal family. For more details, see: Tùng Lâm, op. cit., pp. 28 and 46-48 and NB, p. 171, fn. 2.

41 Due to often harsh living conditions, a number of these students died from malaria or dysentery while in Siam. For more details, see: Đặng Dân Bằng [compiler], Việt Nam Nghĩa Lật Türk [An Historical List of Vietnamese Martyrs], trans. from Chinese to Vietnamese by Tôn Quang Phủệt, (Hanoi: NXBVH, 1959 and 1972 editions), pp. 179 and 183 of the 1959 edition.
ngữ, put to music, and disseminated widely among the Vietnamese communities in Siam for the next decade.42

It is interesting to note that Siam seems to have remained a reference point for Châu in one of his subsequent writings. In a 1918 short story, entitled Chân Tường Quân Tái Sinh Sinh [The True Nature of the Regenerating Army], Châu describes a dream in which he meets the King of Hell. In his audience with the King, Châu explains that he is a wanderer, without a name, known only as he "who knows how to cry." After listening to the wanderer's story, the King asks him to observe the judgement he is about to make on those who have committed sins against their nation and people. As the King prepares to pass the sentences, one of the convicted asks that he be banished to Siam for three hundred years to track elephants. The King of Hell answered in a thundering voice that Siam is a close friend and a people of the same race. Banishment there, he insists, would only be a favour.43

In 1912, learning of the success of the Chinese revolution, Châu left Siam for China in the hope of gaining support for the Vietnamese resistance movement. In a meeting in Canton during this year the Duy Tân was disbanded in favour of creation of a new republican organisation, known as the Việt Nam Quang Phúc Hội (Vietnam Restoration Association). This organisation, modelled on the Chinese Kuomintang and administered by Châu, called for expulsion of the French and the formation of a democratic republic. One of Châu's associates, Trần Hữu Lực (Nguyễn Thúc Đường), was sent to Siam to set up a subsidiary branch, as well as to recruit Vietnamese émigrés into the Quang Phúc army and to raise funds to finance the force. More of a militant than an organiser, Lực advocated resuming armed action against the French and also suggested the formation of frontier posts along the Sino-Vietnamese and Lao-Vietnamese frontiers.44 Foreshadowing things to follow, in 1912 Lực also began work in Siam along the northeastern frontier, creating what he referred to as the "Western Road" (Duong Tây).45 He argued that in this area there must be people to build rear bases and travel to Vietnam to work. Also encouraging this orientation toward Siam was monetary assistance which Lực and his colleagues received from the German and Austrian legations in Bangkok at the outbreak of WWI.46 With this money, the Vietnamese could

42 CVDCQ, pp. 87-88 and Phan Bội Châu, Nguc Trung Thir [Prison Notes], Trans. by Đào Trinh Nhựt, (Saigon: Tân Việt Xuất Bản, 1950), p. 66. See Appendix I for a translation of Ca Aì Đoạn. Copies of Châu's works written in Siam were also smuggled back to Vietnam. See, for example, Phan Bội Châu, Tường Trưng Như Vương/Truyện Phảm Hồng Thái [Drama of the Trung Monarch/Story of Phạm Hồng Thái], (Hanoi: NXBVH, 1967).
46 CVDCQ, p. 19 and Marr, op. cit., p. 229. Writing from prison in China in 1915, Phan Bội Châu was in contact with Dang Tür Kinh in Siam. With a letter of introduction to Châu's earlier connexion to the Prince in the Siamese royal family, Châu dispatched a special envoy, Mai Son, to Siam to meet with the
purchase arms to send back to Vietnam via northeast Siam. In the end, though, Lýc's work in Siam yielded few results. In 1915, he was arrested by Siamese authorities in the northeast through the assistance of a certain Vietnamese spy named Hưng. And although Lýc and a surprisingly large number of other anticolonialists worked in Siam at the turn of the century, hardly any attempted to build durable bases among the large overseas Vietnamese population there.

I.4. Dằng Thúc Héra's Work in Siam

The task of working among Vietnamese nationals was left to Dằng Thúc Héra, undoubtedly the most important individual Châu left behind to work in Siam. Born to a scholarly family in Nghệ-An in 1870, Héra came of age during the French conquest of Vietnam. Like Châu, these events had a profound impact on him. His grandfather, a counsellor to the court in Huế, committed suicide upon the French occupation of the city, while his father resigned his post in the civil service and turned in his seals as the young Héra watched from his side.

In 1900, Héra passed his bachelor degree (tú tài), but refused to join the bureaucracy. Instead, he contacted scholar-patriots working in Nghệ-Tĩnh and garnered funds to help Phan Bội Châu finance students studying in Japan. In 1908, a fierce French crackdown on Vietnamese resistance activities led Héra to leave Vietnam to begin a revolutionary life abroad. With 2,500 piastres he left for Hong Kong to make contact with Châu and buy weapons for the resistance. As we have already noted, in 1909 Héra met Châu in Hong Kong, and from there the two travelled to Siam where Héra (taking the name Tú Ngo) took part in creating the Ban Tham camp.

Prior to the outbreak of WWI, Héra began travelling throughout Siam in an effort to expand anticolonial work among Vietnamese communities. The precise reasons leading him to pay more attention to working among the Vietnamese émigré communities are not clear. It is possible that this interest may have developed during his work at Ban Tham.
Whatever the case, Hira took the initiative in investigating Vietnamese living conditions, talking with families, and gaining a better understanding of their needs and thinking. Such work soon earned him the name Cô Di, which can roughly be translated as "man on the move." However, his activities also attracted the attention of Siamese regional authorities who arrested him in the northeast shortly after Chau left for China. On learning of Hira’s imprisonment in Bangkok, French authorities immediately demanded his transfer to Indochina. Luckily, through contacts among Vietnamese living in Bangkok, Hira was able to gain the intervention of an un-named Siamese official of royal blood, who required the French to identify him from among a group of Siamese elders. Unrecognisable because of his now sun-darkened skin and weathered facial features, Hira narrowly escaped French detection and was subsequently released from jail.

In 1912, Hira sent a letter to cadres in the Viêt Nam Quang Phúc Hội branch in his native village in Nghệ An, instructing them to send qualified cadres to work in Siam and money with which to purchase weapons. One of the first cadres sent was Hira’s younger cousin, Quynh Anh (Nho). Arriving in the central Siamese town of Paknampho in 1913, Quynh Anh learned from Hira that this town had become the main headquarters of Vietnamese resistance activities in Siam, charged with the following tasks: 1) the rearing and instruction of youths; 2) the development of efficient agriculture to sustain youths coming out of Indochina to study; and 3) the raising of enough money to purchase weapons to send back to Vietnam. As Quynh Anh recounted to her biographer in the early 1970s, before she had arrived in Paknampho, Hira and others had already begun forming what were referred to as "farming camps" (tr’ai cày) and youth "training centres" (tr’ai lạc em). Youngsters from patriotic families in Vietnam and from émigré families in Laos and Siam sent their children to these centres to study under scholar-patriots living in exile there.
language among youths; to teach the youngsters a trade; and, above all, to instil in them a spirit of patriotism.57

In addition to this, twice a year Hura travelled to northeastern Siam. To Hura, this was the backdoor to Indochina from where anticolonial adherents in Siam could contact their counterparts in Vietnam and China, as well as an area in which he could work among the large Vietnamese communities settled there.58 During his travels throughout Siam during this time, Hura did help some Vietnamese families to improve their living conditions and to retain an identification with the anti-colonial movement. Between roughly 1911 and 1914, there is evidence showing that Hura was partially successful in winning over the patriotic sympathy of some Vietnamese families in Paknampho in central Siam, in Lampang in the north, and in Tha Uthen and Pak Hin Bun in the northeastern province of Nakhon Phanom.59

Yet Hura's successes prior to WWI were clearly limited. He and his associates did not develop what could truly be called resistance bases or even a clear-cut policy for working among the émigré population. At best, Hura and his colleagues saw Siam as a safe place where activists could temporarily re-group and youngsters could be schooled.60 There was little organisation, with many cadres leaving on a whim, and few arms were actually sent back to Vietnam. At a leadership level, Hura's work was seriously eroded by infighting and an ideological split that manifested itself among anticolonialists based in central Siam during the mid-1910s. After the dissolution of the Duy Tan Hoi in 1912 and its replacement with the Chinese-modelled Quang Phuc Hoi, disagreements emerged between those who followed the new republican line of the Quang Phuc Hoi and those who still believed in putting a monarch back on the throne. According to Nguyen Tai and Hoang Trung Thuc, Hura and a number of other like-minded anti-colonialists61 residing in Siam espoused the new line of the Quang Phuc Hoi, while another group associated with Dang Tu Kinh62 advocated the continued support of Cuong De and reliance on Japan. This split was apparently a divisive issue among scholar-patriots in Siam at the time. Tai and Thuc said that in 1914 and 1915 ideological differences

57 Hoang Van Hoan, op. cit., p. 48; 'Mot Tam Gucmg,' p. 55; and Son Tung, op. cit., pp. 52-55.
58 'Mot Tam Gucmg,' pp. 55-56 and CVDCQ, p. 21, fn. 1. One resistance leader in China with whom Hura was in contact was Ho Ngoc Lam. CVDCQ, p. 21, fn. 1. From Quynh Anh's account, certain Vietnamese families living in the Siamese border towns of Pak Hin Bun and Tha Uthen, located along the Mekong River across from Vientiane, served as "rest stops" for Vietnamese activists coming from Indochina to work in Siam. Thereafter, many cadres made the 200 kilometres trip (three weeks by foot) to the Vietnamese headquarters in Paknampho. Son Tung, op. cit., p. 46-48.
60 Hura was not alone in his work in Siam during this early period. Helping him in one way or another were anticolonialists, such as Dang Tu Kinh, Tran Huru Luc, Le Hong Chung, Ho Vinh Long, Ngo Quang, Hoang Trong Mau (the father of Ho Tung Mau), and Luong Laph Nam. See: 'Mot Tam Gucmg,' p. 54.
61 This group reportedly included: Tran Huru Luc, Hoang Trong Mau, Luong Laph Nam and Ngo Quang. 'Mot Tam Gucmg,' p. 55.
62 Tai and Thuc say this group included: Dang Tu Kinh, Le Hong Chung, and Ho Vinh Long. Ibid., p. 55.
between these two groups were often "fierce at times" (niêu lăn diên ra kích liệt), although the writers fail to explain what, exactly, this meant.63

The WWI years did not make Hűra's work any easier. Because the Siamese government opposed the Germans, the French were able to pressure Bangkok to clampdown on Vietnamese anticolonial activities in Siam. Hűra was dealt his first major blow at the opening of the war when the Siamese succumbed to French pressure by closing Ban Tham. The situation was further exacerbated in late 1914, when his youth training classes in Paknampho had to be moved to a new site in Ban Dong, a small hamlet in Phichit district situated along the Me Nam River.64 Arriving to work with these scholar-patriots in Ban Dong in 1915 (before going on to China) were some of the future leaders of the ICP—namely, Hồ Tùng Mậu (Ich), Đặng Xuân Thanh, and Lê Hồng Sơn.65 However, few other cadres or students seem to have arrived in Ban Dong during this time.66 In late 1915 or early 1916, the Siamese government, almost certainly under French pressure again, required the Vietnamese to vacate Ban Dong.67 Because of stepped up French surveillance and the dislocation caused by these abrupt moves, living conditions deteriorated drastically. Hűra was almost captured by the French again, while many of his students and colleagues were reduced to selling bread, gleaning rice, and even living hand-to-mouth in the forests in some instances.68 In mid-1916, after a meeting with associates to discuss the sad turn of events in Vietnam,69 Hűra sold the farming camps in Phichit, took some of his students, and left for southern China where he resided for the next three years.70

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63 Ibid., p. 55 for the quote and Ibid., p. 55; 'Mây Chuyên,' p. 29; and Son Tùng, op. cit., p. 73-81 for evidence of the rift between Kinh and Hűra. Even within the pro-Quang Phúc Hội faction in Siam there were differences of opinion between those who, like Trần Hữu Lý, advocated resuming armed uprisings against the French in Indochina and those who considered such action to be premature, such as Hűra. 'Một Tâm Gươm,' p. 55. Lê Mạnh Trịnh does not mention this split directly; however, he claims that Hűra did not support the "adventurist" policy of Trần Hữu Lý and Lương Lập Nham who continued to advocate armed action against the French in Vietnam. CVDCQ, pp. 18-19.

64 Hôằng Văn Hoàn, extracts, p. 48 and Son Tùng, op. cit., pp. 59-60. The land in Ban Dong was reportedly very fertile, possibly better than that of Ban Tham. This might be one reason explaining why Ban Dong remained a resistance post into the early 1930s. Ibid., p. 59.


66 Son Tùng, op. cit., pp. 60-61.

67 'Một Tâm Gươm,' p. 56; Son Tùng, op. cit., pp. 59 and 62-64; CVDCQ, pp. 18-19; and 'Mây Chuyên,' p. 29, fn. 1.

68 Lê Trọng Khánh, op. cit., p. 35; 'Một Tâm Gươm,' p. 56; and Son Tùng, op. cit., pp. 63-64.

69 Hűra explained that many leading scholar-patriots had died following a failed uprising in May 1916. Hűra said that these events were now negatively effecting the state of Vietnamese activity in Siam as the French increased their pressure on the Siamese to clamp-down on anticolonialists in Siam. Son Tùng, op. cit., pp. 63-64. For more details of the 1916 uprising, see: Marr, op. cit., pp. 232-33.

70 'Một Tâm Gươm,' p. 56 and Son Tùng, op. cit., pp. 65-66. In the face of these difficult circumstances, a number of Hűra's associates appear to have become disgruntled with the direction of his resistance ideas. Although Vietnamese communist sources are conspicuously brief concerning this matter, an unspecified number of cadres refused to obey his orders. Some patriots opposed Hűra's efforts to sell their land in Phichit to finance the trip to China and to underwrite continued resistance activities. See: 'Một Tâm Gươm,' p. 56 and Son Tùng, op. cit., p. 65.
In mid-1919, Võ Tùng (Sau Tùng), a young activist whom Hũa had come to trust in China, arrived in Ban Dong to begin rebuilding Vietnamese communities into "self-help" groups. He explained to Quynh Anh (who had remained in the area and whom he soon married) that her cousin would soon come back to Siam to administer "a different direction" in Vietnamese activities in Siam. Returning to Ban Dong in late 1919, Hũa found that most of his pre-war work in Siam had disintegrated: there was no leadership, no links to resistance posts in Vietnam, and many cadres had simply lost heart. Hũa discussed the sad state of affairs with Dáng Tứ Kính, stressing the need to revive activities among the overseas Vietnamese. However, the prewar ideological differences between these two remained. Quynh Anh, a witness to these events and probably our most reliable source, told her biographer decades later that Hũa organised an important meeting at the end of 1919 to assess the situation and plot a new course for the Vietnamese resistance in Siam. Anh said that this meeting (which she attended personally) brought an end to the influence of the Quang Phúc Hội in Siam and called for "a complete reorganisation" of Vietnamese activities there. Hũa said that during his stay in China he had met with Vietnamese leaders who had been in Japan and Vietnam, including Phan Bội Châu (although the details of their meeting(s) are hardly mentioned by available Vietnamese communist sources). During his three years in China, Hũa said that he realised that the Duy Tấn Hội and Quang Phúc Hội had never had any clear goals or appropriate organisational programmes. Relying on Anh as our source, Hũa singled out for particular criticism the reliance of the resistance movement on other countries to help the Vietnamese, arguing that the Vietnamese did not have one notable resistance base anywhere. Hũa then recounted, choked with emotion, the tragedy surrounding the failed uprisings in Vietnam during WWI and the deaths of several of his fighting friends at the hands of the French.

At this point Dáng Tür Kính registered his disagreement with Hũa. According to the accounts of both Anh and Tai, Kính told those gathered at the meeting that Prince Cürüng Đẹ had instructed him to form a provisional government which would receive

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71 Son Tùng, op. cit., pp. 70-71. Võ Tùng had been in Paknampho for a short stint in 1914. Ibid., p. 73.
72 Ibid., p. 70.
73 'Môt Tăm Gurcmg,' p. 56 and Son Tùng, op. cit., p. 73.
74 Son Tùng, op. cit., pp. 74-81, cited in consultation with Hoàng Văn Hoan, extracts, pp. 49-50; 'Môt Tăm Gurcmg,' p. 56; and Mây Chuyên, pp. 29-30. In a meeting(s) with Châu in China during WWI, Hũa is reported to have told him that he would return to Siam to preserve bases there. Châu agreed with this policy and Hũa returned to Siam accordingly. See: 'Môt Tăm Gurcmg,' p. 56 and Hoan, extracts, p. 49. While Châu would subsequently fade from the resistance scene, Hũa returned to Siam, more convinced than ever, of the necessity of building bases in Siam. It is possible that Hũa was dissatisfied with the inability of some leaders, not excluding Châu, to plot a clear course for the future of the Vietnamese resistance. This would be supported by a similar experience of Lê Hồng Son (later a ranking ICP member), who had been sent from Siam to China by Dáng Tür Kính to work with Phan Bội Châu during WWI. After having been dispatched by Châu to meet Cürüng Đẹ in Japan in 1920, Son soon realised that Châu's policy was ill-suited for the new needs of the revolution. See: Trinh Chi, op. cit., pp. 71-72. Finally, in what appears to be a criticism of some Vietnamese leaders in China, Hũa (as recollected by Anh) said in the above 1919 meeting that he had not realised "the [poor] quality of some of these individuals [in China] in whom we have heretofore trusted." Son Tùng, op. cit., p. 74.
the backing of the Japanese. Kinh argued that if they supported the Prince, then scholars in Vietnam would follow suit. In Tài’s extract of a conversation he had with Đảng Thúc Hira in 1926 concerning this same 1919 meeting, Hira asked Kinh if he had made any links with the overseas Vietnamese during his work in Siam. Kinh allegedly replied that the overseas Vietnamese were not intellectuals, but rather they were wanderers, of little or no value to the resistance.75

Kinh’s interruption appears to have played into Hira’s hands. Hira rejected out-of-hand Kinh’s reliance on the Japanese. In a long address, Hira emphasised that the Japanese were no different in their colonial designs from the European powers, citing the annexation of Korea as his main example and detailing at great length how the Japanese had betrayed the Vietnamese.76 Hira then took the opportunity to outline a new policy for Vietnamese resistance activities in Siam, one which stressed the need to improve the living conditions of the overseas Vietnamese as a means of building rear-guards in Siam.77 As Anh recalled, Hira ended his address to this meeting by advocating a policy of regrouping the Vietnamese in Siam into stable resistance bases, saying that “wherever there are Vietnamese, there we must have a presence.”78 Hira targeted those areas in Siam which had dense and relatively prosperous Vietnamese communities and instructed cadres to propagate greater patriotism; to help families maintain Vietnamese customs and traditions; and to strive to create better living conditions for them as a means of winning their support. He said that many of those Vietnamese coming to Siam had fled French repression, military service, or debts. "There is no reason why they cannot not join us in the fight against the French to save our nation," Hira argued. In the end, Hira emerged from the dispute with Kinh in full control of Vietnamese resistance activities in Siam.79

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75 ‘Một Tâm Gương,’ p. 56, cited with reference to Sơn Tùng, op. cit., pp. 75-76 and ‘Mấy Chuyện,’ p. 29. There is no doubt that Nguyễn Tài treats Hira very sympathetically in his memoir, calling him “an outstanding figure in the history of the modern Vietnamese revolution.” In ‘Một Tâm Gương,’ p. 56, Hoàng Trung Thục and Tài tell us little about Kinh other than his incorrect views about the resistance and the role of the Vietnamese. Quỳnh Anh, on the other hand, is the only one of our sources to have actually attended this meeting and witnessed the debate between Hira and Kinh. Her recollection of Kinh’s argument does not contradict Tài’s and Thục’s, however, she does not treat Kinh as a resistance misfit, but rather as an individual who happened to hold views counter to those expressed by Hira. Anh is a more reliable source concerning this matter.

76 Sơn Tùng, op. cit., pp. 76-78.
77 ‘Mấy Chuyện,’ p. 30. Quỳnh Anh’s recollection of Hira’s words on this subject are almost identical. See: Sơn Tùng, op. cit., pp. 80-81.
78 Sơn Tùng, op. cit., p. 81.
79 ‘Một Tâm Gương,’ p. 56; Sơn Tùng, op. cit., p. 75, especially fn. 1; and Hoàng Văn Hoan, extracts, p. 49. Kinh subsequently took a low profile in Siam and faded from all important decision-making responsibilities. In contrast to other sources, Anh makes a point of mentioning that at the end of this meeting Kinh was upbeat, talkative, and, as he lit up a cigarette, relieved. This might suggest that the split between Kinh and Hira had been bridged satisfactorily and perhaps with some degree of consensus. Sơn Tùng, p. 81. It is possible that Nguyễn Tài, Hoàng Trung Thục, and Hoàng Văn Hoan, all of whom worked closely with Hira, have not given us the full picture of Kinh and his role in the Vietnamese resistance in Siam. It has been reported incorrectly that Kinh died at the hands of the French during WWI. See: Marr, op. cit., p. 229, fn. 53. Kinh died in 1928. See: Đảng Từ Kinh, Kinh Đảng Hướng Hồn Lịt Si Pham Hồng Thái [Respects to the Memory of the Martyr Phạm Hồng Thái (written in 1924)] in Phan Bội Châu, Tương Trưng, p. 147.
During a trip to the northeast in late 1919, Húra dispatched two representatives to Hà Tĩnh and Nghệ An to exchange information with and deliver letters to leaders in Vietnam concerning the need to establish Siam as both an intermediary point for cadres on the road to China and as a training ground for patriotic youths coming out of Vietnam. That same year he brought twelve youths to the Phichit area to begin training. In the meantime, Húra began his postwar base building in Ban Dong, with the aim of making this hamlet a model for the subsequent construction of bases in Siam. New houses were built, gardens planted, animals raised, and goods produced for yearly consumption, sale, and trade. The amount of land under cultivation was expanded and subsidiary crops were planted in a communal fashion, reviving the earlier farming camp idea. Anh was in charge of re-establishing youth classes in Ban Dong aimed at instilling a community spirit and making sure that youths were taught quốc ngữ. Students read smuggled newspapers and political documents, studied foreign languages, such as English, French, and Chinese, and learned martial arts. During the early 1920s, Ban Dong became the headquarters of the Vietnamese resistance in Siam and the main political training centre for young revolutionaries there.

I.5. The Birth of the Post WWI Bases in Northeast Siam

Regrouping the Vietnamese scattered throughout the rest of Siam was no easy task. Vietnamese communities stretched from Bangkok to Chiang Mai in the north and to Nakhon Phanom in the northeast. Not all of these Vietnamese could speak their mother tongue and some were opposed to making sacrifices for principles in which they may not have had any interest, economically or politically. In fact, Húra found the "old Vietnamese" in the Samsen area of Bangkok and in communities along the southeastern coast unsuitable for his work because they were unable to speak Vietnamese. Alternatively, he targeted those Vietnamese who had fled the French in the late 19th century and were mainly concentrated in northeast Siam (see section I.1). This group remained largely anti-French and consisted of several thousand families, located mostly in the frontier provinces of Udon Thani, Nakhon Phanom, Sakhon Nakhon, Nong Khai, and Ubon Ratchathani.

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80 Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 52 and 'Một Tầm Gương,' pp. 56-57.
81 Sơn Tùng, op. cit., p. 81. Quỳnh Anh, one of those in charge of building the Ban Dong base, had the friendly support of a local Siamese official named Kamnankut, who was a canton chief in Hattaku, a small town near Ban Dong. Ibid., p. 69 and Hoàng Văn Hoan, extracts, p. 51.
82 Ibid., p. 69 and Hoàng Văn Hoan, extracts, p. 51.
83 Ibid., op. cit., pp. 89-91 and 96.
84 'Mây Chuyén,' p. 30. One of the main problems concerning the schooling of youths was making sure they could speak Vietnamese. There were about 20-30 youngsters in the training camps year round at this time.
85 Ibid., p. 30.
According to what Hûra told Nguyễn Tài in 1926, his post-WWI strategy for building bases in northeast Siam depended on selecting reliable cadres who had the abilities to go out among overseas Vietnamese and gain their trust. In dispatching these partisans, Hûra instructed them to take advantage of the professions of the overseas Vietnamese in the northeast, many of whom specialised in carpentry, masonry, bricklaying, and construction. With a view to linking Vietnamese enclaves into a larger, more coherent resistance plan, Hûra directed his supporters to exploit the "the extremely favourable road system" that connected Nakhon Phanom and Nong Khai provinces along the Mekong River to the larger provincial capitals of Sakhon Nakhon, Udon Thani, and Ubon Ratchathani. These, in turn, were intermediary points linked by roads to Bangkok and the resistance headquarters in Phichit. To Hûra and his associates, this road system would facilitate the effective organisation of the large Vietnamese émigré communities in the northeast.

In 1921, Hûra went to work on this plan, spending the next four years working in northeast Siam. There, he devoted his energy to building more patriotic, cohesive and mutually supportive communities—bases we can begin call them—modelled on the "Ban Dong experiment" and orientated towards backing the Vietnamese anticolonial movement. In 1922, he paid particular attention to the matter of constructing liaison bases along the Mekong River in Nakhon Phanom province. These bases were to act as contact points with revolutionary outposts in Vietnam and receiving centres for youths coming from Vietnam. Wat Pa, a hamlet along the Mekong River outside of the town of Nakhon Phanom, was one of the first of these bases. It consisted of eighteen to twenty mainly Buddhist families and was put under the direction of Ngoet Vinh, an overseas Vietnamese who was fluent in Siamese and reportedly had good connexions with local Siamese authorities. Vinh also worked among the one hundred Catholic Vietnamese families in Nong Saen (opposite Thakhek), but the presence of French priests seems to have complicated resistance efforts in this village considerably.

Hûra appointed another Vietnamese national with good relations with Siamese authorities to set up a base in Ton-Phung, a remote Siamese village located five

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86 Ibid., pp. 30-31 and Sơn Tùng, op. cit., pp. 84-85.
87 'Một Tâm Gurong,' p. 57.
88 Sơn Tùng, op. cit., pp. 83-84 and 'Một Tâm Gurong,' p. 57. These communities ranged from collections of a few, dispersed Vietnamese families to hamlets, and, in some cases, small villages.
89 'Mây Chuyen,' p. 31; Sơn Tùng, op. cit., p. 83; and Hông Văn Hoàn, extracts, p. 51. Nguyễn Tài will only say that the French in Nong Saen were "a great threat." Other Vietnamese communist sources discussing activities in Siam during this time skip over the question of Christian influence among the Vietnamese in Siam. It seems likely that French priests, who had worked in these Catholic communities for decades, had considerable influence among the Vietnamese Catholics and were no doubt aware of anti-French resistance efforts to win over their constituencies in Siam. As far as we know, Nong Saen never became an important resistance base in Siam. While I have no direct evidence, it is worth considering that the Vietnamese resistance found it difficult to organise anti-French activities among Christian Vietnamese communities in Siam.
kilometres outside of Nakhon Phanom. Through an old Quang Phúc Hội connexion, Hũr's representatives bought the homes of the few Siamese families residing there and gained permission from local Siamese authorities to till the land legally. After setting up this base, Hũr then returned to Phichit to bring two cadres back to the area to set up another base in Ban Mai, a hamlet situated a short distance north of Nakhon Phanom. Ban Mai was said to have become an intermediary contact point connected to outposts in Vietnam, with Wat Pa and Ton Phung serving as its support camps.90

In Sakhon Nakhon province, Hũr dispatched two partisans to the provincial capital of the same name to work among the one hundred or so Vietnamese nationals living in the area. After making connexions with Vietnamese carpenters, bricklayers, and sawyers, over the next three years Hũr's men presided over the formation of a separate Vietnamese hamlet outside of this sleepy frontier town.91 From there, cadres continued developing bases along the road from Sakhon Nakhon to Udon, with considerable successes in the villages of Ban Han and Nong Han. On the road from Sakhon Nakhon to Nakhon Phanom, the resistance found its way into Tha Hae and Kusaman. And along the Mekong River families were won over to the resistance in Tha Uthen, Na Kae, That Phanom, Mukdahan, and Nong Khai.92 In these small river towns, it does not appear that separate Vietnamese hamlets were actually set up; instead, patriotic families appear to have opened their doors to cadres and students coming from Indochina as a rest stop until they could be transferred on to the larger bases.

The administration of these Mekong bases/families was problematic, for they were located hundreds of kilometres from the resistance headquarters in Ban Dong. As a result, Hũr had to form an intermediary base somewhere between Ban Dong and the Mekong bases. The northeastern provincial capital of Udon was the natural selection. Because of its large, industrious Vietnamese population and its position as the political and economic centre of northeast Siam (linked by roads to Nakhon Phanom, Sakhon Nakhon, and Bangkok), Udon could serve as the inter-change between the Ban Dong headquarters and increasingly important peripheral bases positioned along the northeastern Thai frontier. However, this was much easier said than done, for gaining the support of Udon's Vietnamese communities proved difficult. Many of the Vietnamese there retained little linguistic or ethnic identification with Vietnam, and the younger generation saw little to be gained from supporting the Vietnamese resistance.93

90 'Mỹ Chuyên,' p. 31; Sơn Tùng, op. cit., p. 84; and Hoàng Văn Hoan, extracts, pp. 51-52.
91 'Mỹ Chuyên,' p. 31. Many of the Vietnamese here had come from Hà Tĩnh and Quảng Bình provinces fifty years earlier. There were also survivors of Phan Đình Phùng partisans here. Ibid., p. 32.
92 'Một Tâm Gương,' p. 54 and 'Mỹ Chuyên,' p. 32. Kusaman was an intermediate stopover for cadres travelling between Sakhon Nakhon and Nakhon Phanom. Vietnamese hamlets situated in this area were also favourable to Hũr plans, for they were located along a favourable road network which facilitated Vietnamese trading activities. See: 'Mỹ Chuyên,' p. 35.
93 Sơn Tùng, op. cit., pp. 84-85 and 'Mỹ Chuyên,' p. 32.
Beginning in 1923, Hūra, his trusted colleague, Vō Tung, and others began meeting with Vietnamese families in Udon, targeting elders in their conversations and asking mothers to teach Vietnamese to their children. Hūra sent one of his Udon-born students to work there, but the young man's efforts were not taken seriously by influential, older Vietnamese. Undeterred, in 1924 Hūra dispatched several of his best adherents to begin work creating a small overseas Vietnamese hamlet outside of Udon called Nong Bua. The following year he sent carpenters and bricklayers to start construction there and gained permission from Siamese authorities to farm the land legally. It was only then that "several" Vietnamese families reportedly began to move to Nong Bua.

On closer inspection, it appears that the decision to set up a separate base in Nong Bua may have been both a calculated move on Hūra's part designed to attract Vietnamese over to the resistance more effectively and a reflection of the difficulties involved in winning over the support of the Vietnamese in Udon (and elsewhere). To give reluctant Vietnamese families an economic incentive to join this newly opened hamlet, Hūra recruited Vietnamese carpenters and bricklayers to build houses and he also gained permission from Siamese authorities to till the land legally. The first point would have ensured basic security needs, while the latter point would have allayed the fears of prospective Vietnamese inhabitants worried that deedless land might one day be arbitrarily confiscated by the Siamese. Often Hūra's hamlets in Nong Bua (and in other areas) were located near fertile land, close to large lakes teeming with fish, or in locations with favourable trading opportunities. In short, by convincing Vietnamese nationals that better living conditions could be had in these Vietnamese hamlets, Hūra could build a more efficient and economically productive Vietnamese community and, at the same time, gain their implicit participation in the Vietnamese resistance movement. Once Vietnamese families moved into these "strategic hamlets," it was much easier to win their support through propaganda and political re-orientation. According to Tai, by 1925 the number of Vietnamese families living in Nong Bua had grown to around 40, and by 1929 the number reached 100. In 1925, Hūra expanded his work to another base called Dong On, located ten kilometres outside of Udon. These were the first noteworthy attempts by Vietnamese anticolonial leaders to make the Udon area a part of wider resistance programmes (see Map III and Chart 1, next page).

94 'Mây Chuyên,' p. 32 and Son Tung, op. cit., p. 85.
95 Son Tung, op. cit., pp. 84-85 and 'Mây Chuyên,' p. 32.
96 'Mây Chuyên,' p. 30 specifically and section IV, 'Living among the Masses,' pp. 36-40, for a revealing discussion of Hūra's work among Vietnamese émigrés in Siam. See also: Son Tung, pp. 84-85 and 'Một Tầm Gươm,' p. 57.
Chart I

Vietnamese Resistance Bases in Thailand, 1919-1925

Central Headquarters: Ban Dong (Phichit)

Nakhon Phanom

Udon Thani

Sakhon Nakhon

Ban Mai

Nong Bua

Dong On

Sakhon

Wat Pa Ton Phung

Road from Udon Thani to Sakhon Nakhon

Ban Han Nong Han

Road between Nakhon Phanom and Sakhon Nakhon and along the Mekong River

Nong Khai Tha Hae Kusaman Tha Uthaen Na Kae That Phanom Mukdahan

Leadership Outposts in southern China and Vietnam
By 1924, these bases/families in the northeast had become relatively stable and a system of meeting and escorting students to training camps had become established.\(^{97}\) The hard work of Hira and his associates goes far to explaining the increasing number of youths and cadres travelling to Siam between 1920 and 1925, among whom were such important future revolutionary leaders as Hồ Tùng Mậu, Lê Tân Anh, Phạm Hồng Thái (Châu), Đặng Thái Thuyên (Đặng Canh Tân), and Lê Hồng Phong (Đoàn).\(^{98}\) Although the majority of these revolutionaries were in transit, usually on their way to China, almost all of them spent some time in Siam tending to resistance matters, as well as studying, working, and living among overseas Vietnamese communities. In fact, Lê Hồng Phong and Phạm Hồng Thái spent several months in Ban Dong in the home of Quyhn Anh. It was in Ban Dong that these two Vietnamese leaders were said to have had their first taste of real manual labour.\(^{99}\) After residing in Siam for a period of time, Thái, Phong, Lê Tân Anh, and Hồ Tùng Mậu travelled to China where they had a hand in setting up the Tâm Tâm Xã (The Heart to Heart Association).\(^{100}\) Two Vietnamese communist studies of resistance activities in Siam have argued that Hira’s two-pronged policy of building up bases among the overseas Vietnamese and encouraging the dispatch to and training of youths in Siam contributed to the development of the Việt Nam Thanh Niên Cách Mạng Đồng Chí Hội (Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth League; hereafter referred to as Thanh Niên) in both China and Siam.\(^{101}\)

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\(^{97}\) 'Một Tâm Gương,' p. 57. Cadres travelling to Siam were met at contact points along the Mekong, such as in Ban Mai, and thereafter taken to holding centres/families in Nakhon Phanom province until it was clear they were genuine patriots. From there, Hira’s partisans escorted them to Nong Bua and Dong On for preliminary instruction and language training in French, English, and Chinese, with each student responsible for learning at least one foreign language. Those judged promising were moved on to the main base in Ban Dong where they began political studies. Sources: Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., pp. 39-40; Mây Chuyển, pp. 26 and 31; and Sơn Tùng, op. cit., p. 89. Siamese was not mentioned as a foreign language.

\(^{98}\) Trịnh Chí, op. cit., p. 39; Hoàng Văn Hoan, extracts, p. 53; 'Một Tâm Gương,' p. 57; Sơn Tùng, op. cit., pp. 89-97, especially pp. 89 and 92-93; and CVDCQ, p. 22. Lê Mạnh Trinh says that during this time the Siamese route to southern China was most favourable, "especially for those coming from Nghệ-THiện." CVDCQ, p. 22. Thái and Phong came from the same area in Nghệ An as Quyhn Anh and Hira. Đặng Canh Tân was the son of Đặng Thái Thuyên, a fighting friend of Phan Bội Châu’s. See: Đặng Doàn Bằng, op. cit., p. 75; Sơn Tùng, op. cit., p. 96; and Marr, op. cit., p. 150, fn. 107.

\(^{99}\) Sơn Tùng, op. cit., pp. 90 and 90-97 more generally. To make ends meet, these two had to work for Chinese and Siamese neighbours, tilling the soil and tending livestock.


\(^{101}\) Hoàng Văn Hoan, extracts, p. 53 and Nguyễn Tài and Hoàng Trung Thức [Hoàng Nhật Tân], 'Một Tâm Gương,' p. 59.
Chapter 1

II. Part II: Siam and Vietnamese Communism

II.1. The Development of the Thanh Niên Branch in Siam

In 1925, less than a year after Pham Hong Thai died in a failed attempt to kill French Governor-General Merlin in Canton, Hồ Chí Minh presided over the formation of the Thanh Niên in Canton. This organisation was a departure from earlier anticolonial organisations, such as the Duy Tân Hội and the Quang Phúc Hội. Based in Canton and under Hồ's direct leadership, Thanh Niên placed a greater emphasis on organisation and political and social issues. Young Vietnamese revolutionaries studied political propaganda, agitation, organisation, and the importance of forming mass bases as the foundation of a revolution. Aware of the strategic importance of Siam and the overseas Vietnamese there in relation to the Vietnamese revolution, upon forming the Thanh Niên in 1925, Hồ immediately dispatched partisans to Siam to set up subsidiary branches.102

In Siam, the news of Thái’s death had been met with great sadness, with Võ Tùng and Dặng Thái Thuyên organising a memorial in Ban Dong to commemorate the death of their martyred friend.103 Interestingly, at about the same time, Hồ Tùng Mậu (Ich) returned to Ban Dong to work with these cadres.104 Quynh Anh, who shared her home with Mậu during this period, told her biographer that his revolutionary work in Siam (no doubt in conjunction with Tùng and Thuyên’s) accelerated the pace of resistance activity among the Vietnamese communities in Siam through the creation of such organisations as the Youth Cooperative Association (Hội Thanh Niên Hợp Tác Xã).105 Considering that Mậu was one of the earliest and most respected members of the Thanh Niên in China, his arrival in Ban Dong at this juncture could not have been unrelated to the transformation of the Youth Cooperative Association into the first Thanh Niên branch in Siam in 1926. This cell was under the direct leadership of the General Bureau (Tổng Bộ) in Canton (and later from Hong Kong).106 A second branch was subsequently formed in the Udon area, probably in Nong Bua and/or Dong On. Throughout 1927 and

102 Lê Mạnh Trinh, 'In Canton and Thailand,' in Days with Hồ Chí Minh, (Hanoi: FLPH, 1962), p. 115 and Hoàng Văn Hoan, extracts, pp. 53-54. See also: Yevgeny Kobelev, Hồ Chí Minh, trans. from Russian to English by Vic Schneier and Sergei and Ivan Chulaki, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1989), p. 92. Lê Mạnh Trinh says that after each political training class in Quảng Châu was finished, “one or two delegates” were sent to Siam to work among the Vietnamese there. If we can believe Trinh, even those students who were not appointed to work in Siam had to travel through Siam before returning to Indochina during this time. CVDCQ, p. 23.

103 Son Tùng, op. cit., p. 93. See also: CVDCQ, p. 23.

104 Son Tùng, op. cit., pp. 94-95 and 98.

105 Ibid., p. 95. Its headquarters was in the home of Quynh Anh.

1928, Thanh Niên cells were extended to bases in Sakhon Nakhon and Nakhon Phanom as well.\textsuperscript{107}

According to Anh, her husband, Vô Tùng (Lưu Khải Hồng), became the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Thanh Niên in Siam, while she became a member of the Central Committee.\textsuperscript{108} Considering the leading role played by Đặng Thúc Héra in resistance activities in Siam up to this point, the failure of his cousin to mention him as a ranking member in the Thanh Niên branch probably indicates his diminishing importance in decision-making and the consolidation of the Vietnamese leadership in Siam in the hands of a younger generation.\textsuperscript{109} Whatever the case, from the evidence available the Thanh Niên in Siam sought to organise the education and political orientation of the overseas Vietnamese, with special emphasis on the need for better "linking up" (doàn kết) and instilling greater levels of patriotism. Women's and Farmer's Associations were formed and better contact with resistance outposts in Vietnam was targetted. Because the majority of the Vietnamese population was concentrated in northeast Siam, the headquarters of the Thanh Niên was soon moved from Ban Dong to the Udon area, yet another symbol Udon's growing pre-eminence in Vietnamese resistance activities in Siam.

Despite Đặng Thúc Héra's diminishing influence in leadership decisions, his close links to Vô Tùng and Quỳnh Anh and his respected work among the Vietnamese throughout Siam made him a valuable asset to the Thanh Niên leadership in terms of conveying its programmes to the Vietnamese in Siam.\textsuperscript{110} That Héra remained an strategic bridge for the Thanh Niên to Vietnamese nationals was clear in Udon on 26 August 1926, when he was selected to announce to hundreds of Vietnamese the establishment of Thanh Niên's first Hội Việt Kiều Thần A (The Overseas Vietnamese Friendship Association; hereafter, referred to as HVK). Addressing the first Congress of the Overseas Vietnamese, Héra explained to his compatriots the importance of establishing this self-help association in order to look after their living conditions and the education of their young. Nguyễn Tài, a young activist fresh from Vietnam, had the task of copying extracts of Héra's speech to distribute to Vietnamese communities in Siam. He remembers Héra's opening in his memoir as follows:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{107} CVDCQ, p. 23 and Sơn Tùng, op. cit., p. 95. An ICP history claims that three Thanh Niên cells were formed in Siam. Ban Nghịen Cư Lích Sĩ Đỏng Trung Uông, Nguyễn Sở Kiến Lịch Sĩ Đỏng, Tập I (1920-1945) [Some Events in the History of the Party, Volume I], (Hanoi: NXBST, 1976), p. 128.
\item \textsuperscript{108} Sơn Tùng, op. cit., p. 95. Mậu's residence in Ban Dong might partially explain why the Thanh Niên was first established in Ban Dong. Besides Tùng and Anh, others who probably held leadership positions in the Thanh Niên included: Hồ Tùng Mậu, Lê Mạnh Trinh, Đặng Thái Thuyên, Vũ Văn Kiều, Hoàng Văn Hoan, and Lê Ngọc. See: 'Một Tâm Gương,' p. 54.
\item \textsuperscript{109} In 'Một Tâm Gương,' Nguyễn Tài and Hoàng Trung Thực (Hoàng Nhất Tấn) confirm that Héra was not given "an executive committee position" because of his "old age." 'Một Tâm Gương,' p. 54.
\item \textsuperscript{110} Lê Mạnh Trinh says in his memoir that because of Héra's good connexions among the overseas Vietnamese, the next group of Vietnamese activists found their work in Siam easier. Trinh made no mention of a leadership role for Héra. CVDCQ, p. 22, fn. 1. Héra died on his way back to Udon in 1931 at the age of 61.
\end{itemize}
We are gathered here today to establish the Hội Thân Aí. Thân Aí has the meaning of intimate mutual assistance with the aim of arranging conditions for the making of an adequate living, providing our children with places to study, and, even more importantly, devising careful plans for our national revolution.111

Hória went on to review the fighting history of the Vietnamese people, drawing his audience's attention to the need to drive out the French and praising the recent heroism of Phạm Hồng Thái. In addition to outlining how the HVK would teach Vietnamese and educate their youths, Hória urged the Vietnamese to respect Siamese laws and customs and he advocated the idea of securing permission from Siamese authorities to construct Vietnamese schools. Before ending, he returned to economic matters by explaining that because the Siamese were expanding construction in the Udon area, more jobs were available to Vietnamese bricklayers and carpenters. Hória urged families to move to his hamlets in Nong Bua and Dong On as a means of increasing mutual cooperation and strengthening his resistance bases.

By the end of the decade, the HVK in Udon was said to have numbered around 600.112 Though the Udon area bases had become the centre of Vietnamese activities in Siam, in other areas where there were large Vietnamese communities, such as Sakhon Nakhon and Nakhon Phanom, this organisation was also to be found.113 Direct members, as the HVK referred to them, usually came from these areas where working branches of the HVK could be sustained financially. Members actually paid fees and participated in HVK activities. Indirect members, on the other hand, tended to be "old Vietnamese" or those who lived in distant, scattered areas. Such members were not required to pay dues, but were still considered "sympathetic members" of the HVK.114

The dissemination of information was another way by which Thanh Niên hoped to win over the support of the Vietnamese in Siam. Quóc ngữ was taught to children and adults alike. In 1927, Đặng Thái Thụyền took charge of publishing a Vietnamese newspaper in Ban Dong called Đồng Thanh (Unity; 1927-1928). This Quóc ngữ paper

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111 Quoted in 'Mây Chuyên,' p. 33 (italics in the original) and cited in consultation with the Anh's version in Som Tung, p. 107. From a comparison of these two, it is clear that Anh/Som Tung (1976) did not quote from 'Mây Chuyên' (1965). It is unclear whether Tai was using extracts from his notes of Hória's speech when compiling his memoir. Nevertheless, except for a very few words, both Tai and Quỳnh Anh/Som Tung give virtually identical reproductions of Hória's opening words. Evidence that Tai was responsible for copying down extracts of Hória's address comes from Anh in Som Tung, op. cit., p. 107 and Nguyễn Tài, Mây Chuyên, p. 32. This Congress was convened by orders of the Thanh Niên. See: Som Tung, op. cit., p. 106.

112 'Môt Tím Quang,' p. 57; CVDCQ, p. 25; Som Tung, op. cit., p. 109; and 'Mây Chuyên,' pp. 32, 34-35, and 39.

113 At the end of 1926, bases in Sakhon Nakhon and Nakhon Phanom were home to a HVK branch each. Unlike Sakhon Nakhon, it was more difficult to conduct resistance work in Nakhon Phanom, for it was located directly across from Thakhek and thus more vulnerable to French surveillance. Hória also says that the Vietnamese in Sakhon Nakhon had better links with the Siamese than anywhere else, but it is unclear why this was the case. Mây Chuyên, pp. 32 and 34-35.

reported on living conditions of the Vietnamese in Siam, published revolutionary poetry and short stories, and reported on regional and international events. Copies of papers printed in Vietnam and by the Thanh Nien in Canton were also distributed among cadres working in Siam.115

As a reserve to the Thanh Nien, the Hội Hợp Tác (Cooperative Associations; hereafter, referred to as HHT) was created to give revolutionary training to youths sent from Vietnam. It was often in the HHTs in Siam that many young revolutionaries had their first taste of communal labour. From transplanting paddy in rice fields to building new homes, manual labour was designed by the Thanh Nien to link theoretical knowledge to concrete practice. In these cooperatives, five or six youths were assigned to a construction or farming team, each group collectively responsible for their plot of land, tools, or buffaloes. A minimum subsistence income was distributed to the members with the rest going to the communal fund of the HHT. This money was used to fund the transportation of cadres, the building of schools, and the dissemination of propaganda. Those students who successfully completed their work in the HHT were then admitted into the Thanh Nien in Siam, Canton, or sent back to Vietnam.116

In other instances, Héra discussed with his students the history and mistakes of the resistance movement thus far and stressed the link between "the people" (đàn) and the "nation" (nước).117 He regularly sent youths out to work among nearby Siamese and Vietnamese communities as both a means of teaching them the importance of "investigation" (điều tra) and a way by which they could better understand the living conditions and needs of the common people.118 To an ICP member reflecting later on the time he spent working in a HHT in Siam, labour played an important part in the political conditioning of the students in the HHT, for most of these youths came from relatively well-off families and were students who had rarely used their hands.119 By the end of 1929, there were over one-hundred members in the HHT in Siam.120 It would not be an

115 For more details see: Flood, op. cit., p. 33; 'Một Tâm Gươm,' p. 57; CVDCQ, p. 28; and Sơn Tùng, op. cit., pp. 96 and 98. I was unable to locate this paper in Vietnam.

116 Flood, op. cit., p. 33; CVDCQ, pp. 24-25; and Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 44. Nông Bua, Ban Dong, Sakhon Nakhon, and Nakhon Phanom each had a branch of the HHT. Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., pp. 55, 58, and 59.


118 'Mỹ Chuyên,' p. 45 specifically and pp. 40-46 for a discussion of Héra's education methods from a student who studied directly under him. Alexander Woodside makes a similar point and provides a translation of one of Héra's lectures to his students, as recalled by Nguyễn Tài. See: Woodside, op. cit., pp. 238-39, citing 'Mỹ Chuyên,' p. 45.

119 CVDCQ, p. 24. Hoàng Văn Hoan makes this point as well, saying that as a young intellectual he had no real knowledge of the importance of labour and the masses until he arrived in Siam and began teaching and working with the students and living among the overseas Vietnamese. See: Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., pp. 42-43.

120 Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 44. At the end of 1926 another group of young Vietnamese revolutionaries arrived in Ban Dong: Phùng Chí Kiên (Võ Vĩnh Như) and Võ Văn Kiều (Định). After that came Đăng Thị Hợp and Nguyễn Tài. See: 'Mỹ Chuyên,' p. 26 and Sơn Tùng, op. cit., p. 101. Hoàng Sâm (Ky), later a Major General in the Vietnamese People's Army, was a level I student studying in Udon during the academic year of 1929-1930. In August 1935 he was deported from Siam. See: 'Mỹ Chuyên,' p. 32
overstatement to say that the HHT was one example of how Siam served as a safe sanctuary in which the Vietnamese resistance could administer "revolutionary laboratories."

Through Siam, Thanh Niên's influence also found its way into Vietnamese communities in Laos. In 1927, a representative was sent there to set up branches of the Thanh Niên and the HVK. Efforts were also made to link bases in Siam more closely with Vietnamese communities in Laos as a means to building better liaison with revolutionary outposts in Vietnam. A Vietnamese base in Savannakhet was linked to its counterpart in the Siamese town of Mukdahan, as was Thakhek to Nakhon Phanom and Vientiane to Nong Khai. From the evidence available, this was one of the earliest efforts by the Vietnamese to organise and integrate the Vietnamese in Laos into wider revolutionary plans. Conspicuously absent was a similar interest on the part of Vietnamese in Siam in organising bases in Cambodia (see chapter 4).

II.2. The Importance of Siam Increases (1928-1930)

Toward the end of 1927, Thanh Niên operations in China were disrupted by the violent dispute between the Chinese Communists and Nationalists. The Kuomingtang's repression of the Chinese Communists jeopardised the activities of the General Bureau of the Thanh Niên in Canton, with a number of Vietnamese cadres captured during this period. Once again, as Vietnamese activities in China came under more pressure, the strategic attention of Vietnamese resistance leaders shifted to Siam. A recent Soviet biography of Hồ Chí Minh says that Siam was an attractive alternative to Hồ at this point, because reports from cadres there indicated "that a lot could be done among the Vietnamese" and that the local authorities "were not too particular as to what the Vietnamese were doing." Chinese communists were also thinking in similar terms, with many cadres going there to set up propaganda offices and to administer revolutionary activities among the overseas Chinese. As for the Vietnamese, between 1927-1928 the growing importance of Siam was signalled by the dispatch by Hồ Chí Minh of several trusted associates to work in Siam. And above all, Hồ's arrival in Siam

121 CVDCQ, pp. 23-24 and 28; Lã Mạnh Trinh, 'In Canton,' p. 116; and Hồ Vịt Hoan, op. cit., p. 45. Vientiane was the site of one known Thanh Niên cell.
122 Hồ Vịt Hoan, op. cit., p. 45 and CVDCQ, p. 38. Hoan says in his memoir that the links between Siam and Vietnam were strengthened because of the work of a certain Võ Mai, a cadre in charge of linking bases in Vietnam to those abroad. See: Hồ Vịt Hoan, op. cit., pp. 45-46.
123 Kobelev, op. cit., p. 9. According to Kobelev, in July 1926 Hồ informed the Comintern that a peasant league had been organised for overseas Vietnamese residing in Siam. Ibid., pp. 84-85.
in 1928 and lengthy residence there for over a year pointed up the increased importance of Siam to the Vietnamese resistance.

One young activist sent to work in Siam by the Thanh Nien branch in central Vietnam was Hoàng Văn Hoan, one of Hồ's students from the Canton class of 1926. In late May 1928, Hoan crossed the Mekong into Siam. He was assigned to work in Nong On where he met his other Canton classmate, Lê Mạnh Trinh (Tiên). In mid-1928, Hồ Chí Minh arrived in Siam for the first time. After giving training courses in Ban Đông, Hồ, now travelling under the alias of Thao Chí Minh, made his way by foot to Udon where he met with a number of his young associates from Canton. In a move which consolidated the leadership of Vietnamese resistance activities in Siam under a central authority, Hồ presided over the formation of the Udon Provincial Committee (Tỉnh ủy Udon). This committee consisted of the following key figures: Đặng Thái Thuyễn, Võ Văn Kiều (Dinh or Bun Dinh), Trần Văn Chấn (Tăng), Nguyễn Văn Dự (Hải), and Hoàng Văn Hoan (Nghĩa). Đặng Thái Thuyễn was the secretary of the committee. According to Hoan, Võ Tùng and Lê Mạnh Trinh were not members of this committee, because they were active in Phichit. As for Đặng Thúc Hūra, he was dispatched to northern Siam to set up new bases, symbolising both his continued usefulness to this committee and his less important role in leadership matters.

Dissatisfied with the progress of the Thanh Nien organisation in Udon thus far, Hồ intensified his efforts to establish closer links with Vietnamese nationals. While Lê Mạnh Trinh does not go into details, he says that the Thanh Nien had not been understood thoroughly by the Vietnamese and some cadres were disappointed by its failure to influence the Siamese masses, citing the inability of revolutionary leaders to speak Siamese. Hoàng Văn Hoan, who worked closely with Hồ in Siam, explained that many youths thought their residence in Siam was only temporary and that they would soon be dispatched to China or Vietnam to begin revolutionary work. Thus, few paid attention to studying Siamese or making contact with the local Siamese.

125 Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 455.
126 Ibid., pp. 34-36. Mai Văn Quang and Dương Trí Trung were two students from Nghệ-Tĩnh who studied under Hoan and would later play important roles in the next generation of Vietnamese activities in Siam.
128 Wichan Champisi, op. cit., pp. 30-31; 'Mot Tâm Qua;' p. 58, fn. 1; Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 55; and Sơn Tùng, op. cit., p. 115. During the ten days Hồ was said to have stayed in Ban Đông, he explained to trusted cadres the works of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin. See: Sơn Tùng, op. cit., p. 115. From the evidence available, Hồ appears to have used at least six secret names while in Siam: Thao Chí Minh, Ông Tín, Thọ, Nam Son, Vường (his Canton alias), and Lê Thuy.
129 Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 43.
130 Lê Mạnh Trinh, 'In Canton,' p. 118.
131 Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 56. Hoan's account is corroborated by Lê Mạnh Trinh in 'In Canton,' p. 118.
In a meeting with members of the Thanh Niên immediately upon his arrival in Udon, Hồ discussed these faults with cadres and argued that besides training cadres for the coming revolution, political work should be increased among the Siamese. Secondly, he opened the membership of the HHT to overseas Vietnamese. Thirdly, he suggested that the name of the overseas Vietnamese paper, Dông Thanh, be changed to Thân Aî (Fraternity) and that more articles be published with the aim of increasing the revolutionary spirit among the Vietnamese communities in Siam (see picture on previous page). In training young revolutionaries, Hồ promoted the learning of quộc ngữ and used historical plays, poems, short stories, and songs as mediums to raise the patriotic spirit of his compatriots in Siam. Fourthly, he pushed Hira's policy of opening more schools to train Vietnamese youths. With permits from the Siamese government forthcoming, schools were in operation in Udon, Sakhon Nakhon, Nakhon Phanom, and Ban Dong by the end of the decade. Fifthly, Hồ stressed the importance of maintaining Siamese support and sympathy by respecting the customs, traditions, and laws of the Siamese. In this connexion, he urged Vietnamese, especially the leadership, to learn the Siamese language and script. Hồ took the initiative in learning Siamese and was said to have made considerable progress after a few months.

The address of a Vietnamese representative to Siamese officials attending the opening of a Vietnamese school in Udon in May 1929 reflects a number of Hồ's changes at work. A French agent, who was also present at this meeting, reported the Vietnamese delegate's words as follows:

"History tells us that the Vietnamese and Siamese have enjoyed a close relationship for a long time. This is the reason that since the invasion of our country by the French, our compatriots have taken refuge in your territory. If some of them occasionally contravene your police regulations, it is because they are not aware of the regulations and that is a matter of regret... For several years we have been meeting not only with a view to mutual help, but also with a view to clarifying for each other our obligations as Vietnamese citizens and protegés in your country. If you were not satisfied with our conduct, you would not have authorised the construction of this school. We hope that you remain aware of our loyal and noble feelings towards you and that you do not listen to shameful accusations which would only spoil our friendly relations."

133 CVDCQ, p. 33; and Hồng Văn Hoan, op. cit., pp. 56-57; and Lê Mạnh Trinh, 'In Canton,' pp. 118 and 120. For more details of Hồ's activities in northeastern Siam, see: Trần Lâm, 'Adventure in the Forest, in Days,' pp. 132-38.
134 TNA, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, fl.FI. 39/12, 'The Opening of Vietnamese School in Udon.' I am grateful to Matthew Copeland for bringing these documents to my attention and allowing me to use them here. Translations are also by Copeland. Considering Hồ's presence in Udon during this time and his involvement in setting up a school in Nong Bua, it is not impossible that he had some sort of influence in the drafting of the abovementioned speech.
Such Vietnamese diplomacy could be effective. As the Siamese official attending this meeting told the Vietnamese, "None of us is ignorant of the fact that the Vietnamese and the Siamese have always enjoyed excellent relations with each other." "That is why," he continued, "You prefer our hospitality to that of any other country. We think of you as our brothers and we treat you accordingly."\(^{135}\)

While in Siam, Hồ also paid attention to the importance of Laos. Working out of Sakhon Nakhon and Nakhon Phanom, Hồ built liaison centres in Laos hooked to bases in Vietnam. During a trip to Nong Khai, Hồ and Hoan summoned two cadres from Vientiane to discuss the state of work among the Vietnamese in Laos, with special reference to the matter of establishing closer links between bases on both sides of the Mekong. Hồ was particularly instrumental in strengthening links between Mukdahan to Savannakhet.\(^{136}\) One Vietnamese writer familiar with Hồ's activities in Siam has made the insightful observation that while Hồ was in China he carried out resistance work from the north of Vietnam and while he was in Siam he did the same, but from the western flank.\(^{137}\) This recurrent north/west dichotomy between China and Siam in Vietnamese resistance thinking, first evident among anticolonialists in the late 1880s, was at work again as the Vietnamese resistance prepared to enter a new stage of development.

II.3. The Formation of the Siamese Communist Party

In May 1929, the Thanh Nien's General Bureau convened the First National Congress in Hong Kong. A split occurred during this meeting during which delegates from northern Vietnam called for the dissolution of Thanh Nien and the formation of a Communist Party. The Central Committee opposed this line, supported by the two delegates from Siam, Võ Tùng and Dặng Thái Thuyên.\(^{138}\) With no breakthrough forthcoming, these two suggested that the opinion of Hồ be determined first.\(^{139}\) Following the Congress, two separate communist parties were set up. While the views

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\(^{135}\) Ibid. Such Siamese support was not limited to regional authorities. Parts of the Siamese press also took a sympathetic view of the Vietnamese anticolonial movement. In 1926, the liberal Thai political journal, *Khro Lek* (Iron Armour), translated and published the lively court proceedings of the 1925 trial of Phan Bội Châu in Hanoi. In the introduction, the editor of *Khro Lek* gave his readers a brief background of the scholar-patriot's trial and the fervour it had caused in Vietnam, pointing out that the accused had once resided in Thailand and was a figure whose case against the French "would act as a vehicle for greater knowledge" for the Thais. See: 'Khadi Khrukkhrom nai Prathet Indocin khong Farangset' [A Controversial Case in French Indochina], *Khro Lek* [Iron Shield], 18 January 2469 [1926]. The trial proceedings can be found in issues between 18 January and 27 January 1926.

\(^{136}\) CVDCQ, p. 39. Hồ also travelled with Dặng Thái Thuyên (Ty) during his work in Siam. For a fascinating account of Hồ and Thuyên's work in Siam, see: Trần Lâm, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-38. Hồ no doubt had the large Vietnamese population in Laos in mind when establishing closer links between resistance organisations in Siam, Laos, and Vietnam. We shall return to this topic.

\(^{137}\) Trần Dàn Tiến, *Những Mẫu Chuyênh về Dời Hoạt Động của Hồ Chủ Tịch* [Stories of the Activities of President Hồ], (Hanoi: NXBST, 1975), p. 71. Recent scholarship has provided new evidence suggesting that Trần Dàn Tiến was, in fact, Hồ Chí Minh. If this is the case, the importance of this observation takes on added significance.


\(^{139}\) Hoàng Văn Hoan, *op. cit.*, p. 60.
of the leadership in Siam concerning this split remain unknown, on learning of the decision taken in Hong Kong, Hồ advised the Thanh Niên headquarters in Siam not to publicise the break until the groups could be unified. Sometime during the latter half of 1929, Hồ left Siam.140

Under pressure from the Communist International to create one party, Hồ Chí Minh convened a meeting in Hong Kong in February 1930, from which the Vietnamese Communist Party was formed. The next month, Hồ returned to Bangkok, where he met with Chinese communists and thereafter travelled to Udon to meet with members of the Provincial Committee.141 He explained to the committee the international situation, the recent unification of the communist parties, and relayed the Comintern's desire to establish a Siamese Communist Party.142 Hồ made it clear that the Comintern had issued instructions calling for the participation on the part of all cadres in the proletarian revolution in whichever country they might reside. For this reason, Hồ said, Vietnamese cadres in Siam now had the responsibility of helping the Siamese people make a revolution. Hồ advised the Udon Provincial Committee to select appropriate members to become communists and help establish the Siamese Communist Party, separate from the Vietnamese Communist Party.143 In another meeting, Hồ argued that Siam was still a feudal country and a semi-colony. It had not reached the stage of a socialist revolution, for it first had to pass through a democratic period, and then, with the help of international communism, it would reach the stage of a socialist revolution.144 This was the first time that Vietnamese resistance leaders had paid any real attention to the matter of Siamese internal affairs apart from maintaining amiable relations with regional authorities in order to safeguard their own patriotic activities in Siam.

In meetings with the leaders of the Udon Provincial Committee, Hồ outlined concrete steps to be taken toward the creation of a Siamese Communist Party (hereafter referred to as the SCP). He specifically suggested that the Udon Committee become a Communist Provincial Committee. This was done sometime in March or April 1930, with Võ Văn Kiều taking over as secretary of the Committee following Dang Thai Thuyen's arrest.145 Hồ instructed the Udon Committee to help branches of the Thanh Niên in Laos make the transition over to communism as well. In April 1930, Hồ and Trần Văn Chân, on behalf of the Vietnamese communists, travelled to Bangkok to meet with their

140 Ibid., p. 60. Hoan says that Hồ left Siam in September 1929.
141 Quỳnh Anh told her biographer that her husband, Võ Tùng, and Dang Canh Tân were to attend the meeting on behalf of Thanh Niên branches in Siam and Laos, respectively. However, after failing to arrive in time, they returned to Bangkok in March 1930 where they were immediately arrested by Siamese authorities tipped off by the French. They were turned over to the French and given prison terms in Ban Mê Thuột, where Dang Thai Thuyen later died at the hands of the French. Sơn Tùng, op. cit., p. 117 and Hoang Văn Hoan, op. cit., pp. 60-61.
142 Hoang Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 61.
143 Ibid., pp. 62 and 63.
144 Ibid., pp. 62-63.
145 Interview with Hoàng Nhật Tân, 5 May 1989, Hanoi.
Chinese counterparts, with no mention made of meeting Siamese representatives. On 20 April, a meeting was held among these groups during which Hồ participated as a representative of the Comintern. Under instructions from the Comintern, this meeting formally proclaimed the establishment of the SCP and appointed a Bangkok-based provisional Central Committee, actually referred to as the Central Executive Committee of the Siamese Party, or the Siamese Commission (ụy Xiêm) as it was called for short by Vietnamese cadres. Trần Văn Chấn participated in this commission as a member of the Udon committee along with Ngô Chính Quốc, an overseas Vietnamese born in Siam who was probably a confidant of Hồ.146 After having nearly escaped capture by the French thanks to a tip-off from an apparent double agent working for French intelligence in Siam, Hồ went undercover disguised as a Buddhist monk before leaving Siam to help set up the Malayan Communist Party.147

Meanwhile, Trần Văn Chấn returned to Udon to report to the provincial committee on the formation of the SCP and the new responsibilities of the party in northeast Siam. According to decisions made by the Siamese Commission, the Udon Communist Provincial Committee would now be responsible for activating the revolution in northeast Siam. At another meeting, discussed again was the importance of making a Siamese revolution. Some un-named members of the Provincial Committee had reservations about the idea of Vietnamese helping the Siamese to make a revolution, but were overruled by those advocating communist international support for the oppressed, even if it meant inviting repression.148

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146 Flood, op. cit, p. 34, citing confidential Thai communist sources, and Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit, pp. 63-64.

147 For Hồ's near escape, see Trần Dần Tiến, op. cit, p. 71. For his exit from Siam, see: Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit, pp. 64 and 90; 'Những Nét Cổ Bàn về Tình Hình Thái Lan' [Some Basic Views on the Situation in Thailand], (Hanoi: Ủy Ban Liên Lạc Văn Hóa vơi Nước Ngoài, 10 July 1968), p. 37; and Flood, op. cit, p. 34. Wichan Champisi, citing the dissertation of Siamese Police Colonel Thawat Phitakh on the Vietnamese in Siam, says that upon returning to Siam for the second time Hồ had a Vietnamese contact working in the French Legation in Bangkok. In one case, Hồ, using the alias Lê Thụy, allegedly avoided arrest during a demonstration in Bangkok through the assistance of a Vietnamese Legation officer who sheltered him in the delegation, with other French officers apparently unaware of Hồ's true identity. See: Wichan Champisi, op. cit, pp. 30-31. Hoàng Văn Hoan reveals in his memoir that Đặng Nguyên Hùng, a revolutionary who had travelled to Siam with Lê Hồng Phong and Hồ Tùng Mậu in the early 1920s, later left the resistance to enter an American Christian missionary school in Siam and enlisted as a warrant officer in a Siamese Infantry School. He then worked for the French Legation as a spy for Đỗ Hưng. Allegedly penniless, he quit the Legation in Bangkok to arrive in southern China to join the Vietnamese resistance. Because Hồ and other communist and non-communist revolutionaries were in contact with Đặng Nguyên Hùng in southern China in the 1930s and allocated him some resistance work, it suggests that he may have helped them in some way earlier in order to have gained any work at all from them. Considering his 1920s links to individuals who soon became major Vietnamese revolutionaries, it is possible that he had assisted Vietnamese activists in Siam even while working as a spy. Nevertheless, veteran revolutionaries in the 1930s were troubled by his spy past and questioned the depth of his commitment to the resistance. See: Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit, pp. 89, 101, 108, and 110-11.

In October 1930, as the Vietnamese Communist Party was being renamed the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) under Comintern instructions, the Provincial Committee convened a congress of Vietnamese members from Udon Thani, Sakhon Nakhon, and Nakhon Phanom provinces to determine the party's future policy. During this congress, a representative of the Siamese Commission introduced the establishment of the SCP and announced that the Udon Provincial Committee was now a Party Branch (Dang Bồ) of the SCP responsible for northeast Siam.149 To prepare to undertake this task, a subsequent special meeting was held by the Provincial Committee to discuss the problem of Vietnamese activities in Siam. One result was an increased intake into the SCP of youths from Thanh Niên's HHT, who were instructed to learn Siamese in order to link more closely with the Siamese masses. Evidently, a number of Vietnamese students even entered Siamese schools during this time. As one of those proficient in Siamese, Hoàng Văn Hoan was assigned to run a Communist Youth League. In 1931, Hoan's influence increased even more when he replaced the secretary of the Udon Provincial Committee, Võ Văn Kiều, following the latter's death.150

II.4. The Tasks of the SCP in Siam (1930-1939)

II.4.1. The Work of the SCP among the Siamese

Although the SCP was largely a Vietnamese and Chinese creation, it did try to attract Siamese members. Hoàng Văn Hoan says that a Siamese cadre, referred to by the Vietnamese as Van, "was influenced by the Party" and helped in the dissemination of propaganda against the Bangkok government in the early 1930s.151 According to the memoir of an overseas Vietnamese cadre who worked in Siam, five to seven Siamese were actually admitted into the SCP at some point. One such Siamese cadre was a certain Nai Hom, who was sent to Moscow for training but was held up for unknown reasons in China and returned subsequently to work in Laos. Another member, Nai Thum, went to the Soviet Union but remained idle upon his return to Siam. A third Siamese member, known as Su Riu, was a Siamese communist working in France.152

A communist letter intercepted by the British from the Siamese Executive Commission (which appears to be the same Siamese Commission which Hoan describes) to the

149 Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., pp. 65-66 and Weng Tocirakan, op. cit., p. 142. Members from Phichit could not attend because of strong suppression of their activities at this time. So far, there is evidence of four ICP Party Sections in Siam: one each in Ban Dong, Nong Bua, Phichit and Khon Kaen, with other branches probably in Nakhon Phanom, Nong Khai, and Sakhon Nakhon. See: 'Mây Chuyên,' p. 46 and Sơn Tùng, op. cit., pp. 124 and 133. Quynh Anh became a member of the ICP in Khon Kaen in April 1934.

150 Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 66.

151 Ibid., p. 89.

152 This information comes from a memoir of an un-named overseas Vietnamese in Siam which was made available to the author by Hoàng Nhật Tân during an interview on 5 May 1989, Hanoi. The author of this memoir was an associate of Hoàng Văn Hoan's who had begun his work in Siam in the early 1920s.
Malayan Communist Party indicates that the SCP had a number of serious internal problems. With the SCP's total membership put at 325, the Commission administered two provincial committees, four divisional committees, five branches, and three special cells. There were few links with the peasants in rural areas, with the one exception being a provincial committee, but even it was said "not to be functioning as it should." Moreover, of the 325 members most were industrial and estate workers who were said to have been "of weak quality," unable to carry out their tasks effectively.\textsuperscript{153} In another captured communist document, some members were criticised for their "egotism, respect for the upper class, romanticism, thinking only of one's . . . country, self, . . . and opportunism."\textsuperscript{154} As for the leaders, they were said to "talk too much and work too little."\textsuperscript{155} Perhaps most divisive was the Party's predominantly non-Siamese character. Apart from its handful of Siamese members and another fifty-five Vietnamese ones, the rest were all Chinese. One document cited this as the main reason explaining why "the movement among the natives has not been carried out."\textsuperscript{156} In November 1932, a Party paper had this problem in mind when it reminded members of the internationalist line of the Party.\textsuperscript{157} Besides these challenges, there were also fears that the "central committee" had been penetrated by Siamese spies who, as one document read, were "working to trick us."\textsuperscript{158}

Propaganda among the Siamese masses was the chief way by which the Party hoped to promote a Siamese revolution. One of those in charge of this task was Hoàng Văn Hoan, whose language skills in both Siamese and Chinese probably account for his appointment as a propagandist. Hoan tells us in his memoir that he spent much of his time translating documents and pamphlets, written by Chinese members, into Siamese, to commemorate International Women's Day, the anniversary of the Russian Revolution, and other important dates.\textsuperscript{159} The SCP had access to printers with which leaflets were printed in Siamese, Vietnamese, Chinese, and English and distributed throughout the

\textsuperscript{153} TNA, n.PH.39/13-30, Communists 2473-2480 [1930-1937] Box 2, 'Siamese Executive Commission to the Malayan Communist Party,' 20 September 1932. While there was a peasant organisation under one of the provincial committees, it was "not functioning as it should." A summary of some of these captured communist documents can also be found in GB, PRO, FO 1558/1558/40, 'Annual Report, 1932: Mr. Dormer to Sir John Simon,' 24 January 1933, pp. 11-12.

\textsuperscript{154} TNA, n.PH.39/25, 9 ½, 'Under-secretary of Ministry of Interior to Under-secretary of Ministry of Foreign Affairs,' 16 September 1932.


\textsuperscript{156} TNA, n.PH.39/25, 9 ½, 'Under-secretary of Ministry of Interior to Under-secretary of Ministry of Foreign Affairs,' 16 September 1932. This is supported by un-named Thai Communist Party sources cited by Flood, op. cit., p. 34.

\textsuperscript{157} TNA, n.PH.39/26, 'Communist-Banishment of Chinese Citizens, 2475-2476 [1932-1933], Party Monthly Paper,' 15 November 1932. Quyên Anh confirmed that the SCP did have a secret Party paper. Son Tung, op. cit., p. 124.

\textsuperscript{158} TNA, n.PH.39/25, 8 ½, 'Under-secretary of Ministry of Interior to Under-secretary of Ministry of Foreign Affairs,' 16 September 1932. See also: Flood, op. cit., p. 34.

\textsuperscript{159} Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., pp. 72-73 and 75. Hoan worked selling newspapers in Bangkok in order to cover his living expenses in the early 1930s.
country, particularly in the Bangkok area where the working class was concentrated. The SCP's propaganda efforts targeted such groups as rice millers, tramway workers, rickshaw drivers, railway workers, many of whom were forming unions or striking for better conditions in the early 1930s. According to a British source, on 30 September 1932 a large number of leaflets, signed by the Communist Party and the Communist Youth Party of Siam, were spread throughout Bangkok and outlying towns. These leaflets called for the overthrow of the People's Party and attacked the monarchy. It was reported that a Vietnamese by the name of Le Hang Phong (Le Hồng Phong?) was probably behind this. He was said to have been in Bangkok earlier, but had eluded police.

At the end of 1933, Ngô Đình Quóc, one of the Vietnamese members of the Siamese Commission, was arrested by Siamese authorities in Bangkok and handed over to the French. Replacing him as a central committee provisional member was Hoàng Văn Hoan, who now joined Trần Văn Chân as the second known Vietnamese communist on this commission. In 1934 or 1935, when the secretary of the Commission became ill, Chân reportedly took over the leadership of the Commission. While it is clear from Siamese, Vietnamese, and Western sources that the SCP sought to promote a revolution among the Siamese masses, results were anything but successful. Most importantly, the June 1932 change of government in Siam that ended the absolute monarchy was a major political development which the SCP leadership was following closely. And although 24 June encouraged many communists in the hope that Siam would soon join in the movement towards socialist revolution, the People's Party (PP), led by Pridi Phanomyong, was the SCP's most formidable competitor. As the SCP informed the Malayan Communist Party, the new government "is now a dictatorship of the PP" which is working to prevent a revolution of the masses and had not abolished regressive taxes and licenses. The Communists were also worried that the PP had dispatched spies to

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161 GB, PRO, F. 1558/1558/40, 'Annual Report, 1932: Mr. Dormer to Sir John Simon,' 24 January 1933, pp. 11-12. The French had similar suspicions that Lê Hồng Phong might have been behind the dissemination of such pamphlets in Siam in 1932. Gunn, op. cit., pp. 48-49.

162 Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., pp. 72 and 455. See also: Gouvernement General de L'Indochine, Direction des Affaires Politiques et de la Sûreté Générale, Contribution à l'histoire des mouvements politiques de l'indochine française, Le "Đông-Dương Công-Sàn Đảng" ou "Partie Communist Indochinois" (1925-1933), pp. 43-44.

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prevent a revolution among the masses and win them over to the PP's side. Another document prepared for a Lenin's day celebration on 21 January 1933 said that the new government was no different from the monarchy, "although it is employing crafty techniques to trick the people, to make sure that they do not start to believe in socialism... In consequence, we feel that the PP is more oppressive than ever."165

Immediately after 24 June, the SCP attempted to take advantage of potential social tension to promote a revolution against the new liberal leaders. The SCP instructed its members to "be careful of the propaganda work of the People's Party... [and to] use some of our people to get inside the People's Party and steal their people over to our side."166 According to captured Party documents, instructions had been given to cadres to investigate the state of worker preparedness for a planned political demonstration set for 1 August 1932. On this day, strikes and boycotts would be launched to "get all labourers together to end oppression." Communist cadres infiltrated labour groups to explain the 1 August demonstration, attended factory meetings to address the workers, and sought to win over the support of Bangkok's rickshaw drivers and rice millers. Handbills were printed by the SCP propaganda machine calling for the overthrow of the PP and the increasingly powerful military group which was consolidating its power. Workers were urged to strike for pay raises, shorter working weeks, and representation in management decisions.167 In the northeast, the communist leaders of the ICP cell in Khon Kaen organised Vietnamese and Siamese to demonstrate against high taxes, the end result being the arrest and incarceration of many cadres, including Quynh Anh.168

In the end, internal problems appear to have undermined the SCP's ability to effect any changes among the workers in Bangkok. Some cadres were opposed to the 1 August "uprising," with a certain member's disagreement with the Party singled out as a display of irresponsibility, weakness, and indiscipline.169 However, while the 1 August demonstration accomplished little, it did unwittingly attract the attention of the increasingly powerful anti-communist military group in the Siamese government. Communist documents report that from the day their handbills went out announcing the 1

164 Ibid.
167 TNA, n.P. 39/25, 8 U, 'Under-secretary of Ministry of Interior to Under-secretary of Ministry of Foreign Affairs,' 16 September 1932 and Hoang Van Hom, op. cit., p. 75. See also: Sithan Rakprathet, op. cit., p. 26. According to the British Minister at Bangkok, the Javanese revolutionary, Tan Malaka, was on his way to Siam "with money and instructions," when he was arrested in Hong Kong. GB, PRO, FO 1558/1558/40, 'Annual Report, 1932: Mr. Dormer to Sir John Simon,' 25 January 1933, p. 12.
August event, Siamese authorities were armed heavily, "under the impression that the people will begin an uprising."¹⁷⁰

But no uprising ever occurred. An article published in a Party paper in November 1932 summed up the reasons preventing the SCP from making any significant inroads among the Siamese masses:

Our party is called the communist Party of Siam, but in truth our Party has but Chinese. . . . The basis by which we can change Siam comes down to a method by which we can bring Siamese into the Party. This is not a new problem. The same measure was discussed at our meeting last year . . . where we decided that the first step was for members to study Siamese in preparation for contacting Siamese. It was decided to seek results in six months, but from that time to the present it has been a year and not a single branch has announced progress . . . The Party has investigated political developments in Siam and has come to the conclusion that if we do not have Siamese friends join with us, we will be unable to perform our task of changing Siam . . . We've been unable to influence events, like the strike of the rickshaw pullers, the student strike at Assumption College, or the tramways movement. The Party has been unable to get them to follow our suggestions and fight according to our plan.¹⁷¹

Hoàng Văn Hoan, who was a member of the Siamese Commission, claims that one important obstacle blocking the SCP's capacity to promote a Siamese revolution was that there was no clear policy guiding the Commission's work. In addition, despite the large Chinese population in Bangkok, Hoan says that Chinese cadres had very little influence among the Siamese people. As for the Vietnamese, they were said to have had more influence among the Siamese in the northeast. However, because the efforts of the resistance had previously arranged the overseas Vietnamese in specific areas in the northeast, readily known to Siamese authorities, it was easier for the police to make sweeping arrests.¹⁷² A 1968 Vietnamese communist document analysing the history of the Siamese Communist Party states that while the SCP made very little headway among the Siamese masses during its lifetime, it did cause the "great worry" of the post-1932 Siamese government. This source confirms that at the outset the SCP increased its political activity among Siamese workers, paying particular attention to the formation of

¹⁷⁰ TNA, n. W. 39/25, Communists 2473-2480 [1930-1937], 'Bolshevik Central Office of Siam to Officials of the Siam Commission,' 31 July 1932. It was reported that Siamese military officials were dressed in full combat gear by the 1 August date.

¹⁷¹ TNA, n. W. 39/26, Communists-Banishment of Chinese Citizens, 2475-2476 [1932-1933], 'Party Monthly Paper,' 15 November 1932 for the quote. In 1935, Hoan told his superiors that upon its founding in 1930 the SCP was primarily a Chinese and Vietnamese creation. Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 93. Without elaborating, Flood cites Thai Communist sources as saying that the "historic conditions peculiar to Thailand" kept the "political consciousness among Thais low." Flood, op. cit., p. 34.

¹⁷² Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., pp. 75-76, 90-91, and 93.
trade, tramway workers, and rickshaw driver unions. One reason cited for the failure of the SCP to effect change among the Siamese masses was the success of the military government in promoting a "narrow nationalist line among the workers" which cut the the workers off from the Communist Party. As for the peasant class, the "democratic bourgeoisie" (that is, the PP) were allied with them, using such tools as the press and nationalism to win them over. According to this source, the SCP's activities were limited to the dissemination of Marxist propaganda among the workers and the different working classes. Though it was called a Party, it was really only a group of loosely bound Marxist groups, not yet an official, united Party with a clear revolutionary fighting programme.

Besides trying to mold a Siamese revolution, the Vietnamese were also used by competing Siamese political factions following the 1932 change of government. In one case, Mom Chao Setsiri, the brother of Prince Boworadet (the leader of the unsuccessful royalist counter coup in 1933) and Prince Sitthiphon, had a group of Vietnamese in Tambon Bang Phut under their direction. Setsiri was sending money to Cambodians and Vietnamese to buy "tools" and was reported to have had access to large quantities of ammunition as well. Through his wife, Setsiri was related to another shady figure named Seng Khamen, an individual of Mon or Khmer blood. Seng, who had links to the Siamese police, had numerous contacts with Vietnamese in the Bangkok area and was said to have had some sort of an agreement with them. A leader of one of the Vietnamese groups informed Seng that his group felt that the People's Party was "dishonest and acting incorrectly" and that if his Vietnamese group were to cooperate with Seng, then money would have to be given out for businesses, farming, and channelled into other occupational development areas for the Vietnamese. Another report said that a certain

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173 'Những Nâ,t,' p. 37.
174 Ibid., p. 38.
175 Ibid., p. 37, cited with reference to the Thai Communist source, Weng Tocirakan, op. cit., pp. 142-43. Weng, perhaps wanting to understate the importance of the SCP, says it was not truly a party, but a "flop." However, there is evidence suggesting that the SCP may have had difficulty in organising itself as a genuine "Party." In February 1932, the Comintern asked the French, Indian, Chinese, and Malayan communist parties "to assist communists in Siam to organise a Communist Party in correct accordance with the policies of International Communism." See: Đảng Cộng Sản Việt-Nam Ban Chấp Hành Trung Ương, Văn Khiên Đảng: 1930-1945, Tập I [Party Documents: 1930-1945, Volume I], (Hanoi: Ban Nhiên Cửu Lãnh Sự Đảng Trưng Ương Xứt Bản, 1977), p. 291 [hereafter cited as VKD, Vol. I]. On 20 August 1935, Pravda printed a speech by a Siamese communist known as "Rashi," who said that the Siamese party was not yet a "section of the [Communist] International," but hoped to be. See: US, DOS, Division of Biographies Information, Office of Librarian and Intelligence, 'Far Easterners in the Comintern Structure,' No. 5226, 7 December 1950.
176 TNA, ff.7.0201.16/25, Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, [hereafter, cited as OPMC], 'Change of Government, Secret Reports-Report of Nai Chumcharoen,' 27 November 1932. I am grateful to Matthew Copeland for allowing me to use these documents here. A forthcoming PhD thesis by Copeland will add much to our understanding of the intricacies surrounding Siamese politics during this period and the intellectual trends informing the changes of 1932-1933, in particular.
Nai Thai, a Vietnamese leader in Tambon Ban Phut, told his group that the new "government has failed to act correctly and has been dishonest."\textsuperscript{178}

The SCP was dealt a devastating blow in April 1933 when the Siamese government passed strict anti-communist legislation. There were various politically-motivated reasons explaining the promulgation of this tough law, but the propaganda efforts by Chinese and Vietnamese communists calling for the overthrow of the new government certainly did not help, fuelling the anti-communist line being taken by an increasingly powerful Siamese military elite.\textsuperscript{179} Continuing in the tradition of the severe anti-bolshevik laws first put into place by the monarchy in 1927, the 1933 anti-communist legislation meted out heavy sentences of up to ten years for political agitation or unrest caused "by words or writings or printed documents or by any means whatever [which] advocate communism."\textsuperscript{180} Between 1933 and the outbreak of WWII, the Siamese, spurred on by the French legation in Bangkok, stepped up their surveillance and arrests of Vietnamese, especially in the northeast. While some of those arrested may not have been actual communists, a large number were. By the end of the decade, the maximum security gaol north of Bangkok, Ban Khwang, was home to key members of the SCP leadership, including Trần Văn Chân and Quynh Anh.\textsuperscript{181}

Ironically, to many of those Vietnamese communists confined to Ban Khwang during the 1930s, incarceration proved a valuable learning experience. More than one Vietnamese jailed during this period has referred to this prison as the "University of Ban Khwang." It provided opportunities for the Vietnamese to learn new languages, to increase solidarity, to discuss their political mistakes, and to plot a future course of

\textsuperscript{178} TNA, OPMC, fl.1.0201.16/25, 'Change of Government, Secret Reports-Report of Nai Chumcharoen, 27 December 1932. A "Nai Thongdi" was mentioned as another leader of the Vietnamese.

\textsuperscript{179} Suphot Dantrakun, Prasert Thrapsunthon, (Bangkok: Borisat Klet Thai, introduction dated 1981), pp. 27-28 and 34 and Sithan Rakprathet, op. cit., pp. 26-27. While the Siamese monarchy adopted a tougher line toward the Vietnamese in the early 1930s, Vietnamese activists still found that the court could be helpful in some cases. Benjamin Batson has provided a very good discussion of the court's attitude toward Vietnamese anticolonialists working in Siam in the early 1930s. See: Benjamin A. Batson, 'Siam's Political Future: Documents from the End of the Absolute Monarchy.' SEADP, No. 96, (July 1974), pp. 62-63.

\textsuperscript{180} 'People's Assembly Dissolved,' BTWM, 3 April 1933. See also: GB, PRO, FO. 1909/1909/40, 'Annual Report, 1935: Sir J. Crosby to Mr. Eden,' 24 February 1936, pp. 14-16. In April 1930, the Siamese King made a trip to Indochina during which the French asked the monarch to crack-down on the Vietnamese in Siam. For details of cooperation between French intelligence and Siamese police to monitor Vietnamese resistance activities, see: Daniel Hémery, op. cit., pp. 160-61, fn. 31; Benjamin A. Batson, The End of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam, (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 169-70; and CVDCQ, p. 101, for a copy of an ICP document revealing communist fears that the French would create fabrications to convince the King of the importance of suppressing Vietnamese activists in Siam.

\textsuperscript{181} Interview with Hoang Nhật Tấn, 5 May 1989, Hanoi; CVDCQ, pp. 45-46; Son Tùng, op. cit., p. 153; and Interview with Trần Văn Dính, 20 June 1990, Washington, DC. In 1934, it was reported that the British Acting Consul-General in Bangkok was informed by the Director-General of the Siamese Criminal Investigation Division (CID) that the communists in Siam "need not be taken seriously." The CID was reportedly more interested in keeping an eye on "undesirables" (i.e. the Chinese) arriving from abroad. GB, PRO, FO 1931/1931/40, 'Annual Report, 1934: Sir J. Crosby to Sir John Simon,' 30 January 1935, p. 12.
Yet life in Siamese prisons could also be brutal. In one instance, a Vietnamese by the name of Trân Bà Giao was sent to Ban Khwang where he demanded improvements in living conditions. He was said to have died at the hands of Siamese prison authorities. In June 1935, the *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail* reported that a skirmish had broken out in a Sakhon Nakhon gaol between prison authorities and 72 Vietnamese prisoners, armed with sticks, who were demanding certain basic human rights from the prison authorities. One Vietnamese prisoner was killed.

Siamese repression such as this posed serious problems to Vietnamese cadres in charge of bringing about a Siamese revolution. In 1934, the ICP's Overseas Office in Hong Kong sent the communist paper, *The Bolshevist*, to cadres in Siam calling for continued class struggle with no compromises. In May of that year, Trân Văn Chân travelled to Hong Kong to participate in a meeting of the ICP's Overseas Office. Before leaving, Hoan claims the two discussed the need to ask for advice concerning the difficulty of promoting a "Siamese revolution." According to Hoan's account, when Chân returned to Siam, he had little to say other than the need to continue the revolution in Siam according to the Bolshevist line. This went on until mid-1935, with Hoan claiming in his memoir later that he had suspected at the time that Chân had not reported the problems of the SCP to the Overseas Office.

The ICP's First Party Congress in Macao in March 1935 did little to address Hoan's concerns. During this Congress, the ICP continued the international line calling for increased efforts to promote a revolution in Siam. As a 31 March letter to the SCP from an ICP Central Committee delegate at the Macao Congress read in part:

"We ask that the SCP lead the revolutionary struggle of the Siamese working masses enthusiastically and develop it fully... The revolutionary activities in every region are a part of the world revolution. All are class brothers in the capitalist, colonial, and semi-colonial regions. You have our warmest support in the revolutionary struggle of the courageous worker-peasants and among the working Siamese masses."

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182 Quynh Anh, who was jailed in Ban Khwang during the 1930s, recounted interesting stories to her biographer concerning the social structure of this prison, including the relationship between Vietnamese communists and those Siamese nobles who been jailed for their role in the unsuccessful 1933 royalist coup led by Prince Boworadet. See: Son Tung, op. cit., pp. 143-55.

183 See: CVDCQ, p. 47.


185 Hoang Văn Hoan, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-77 and 91.


187 'Thư Gửi cho Trung Ương Đảng Cộng Sản Xiêm,' [Letter to the Central Committee of the Siamese Communist Party], VKD, Tạp I, p. 655. See Appendix III for a translation of this document in its
To some SCP leaders concerned with the large-scale arrests of Vietnamese leaders and its effect on their capacity to aid the Vietnamese revolution, the Macao line must have seemed out of touch with reality. In early 1935, Hoan left Siam for China citing genuine health reasons, but also with the secret intention of meeting with ICP leaders to discuss the problem of having Vietnamese cadres promote a Siamese revolution. In China, Hoan explained to Hà Huy Tạp (a ranking representative of the ICP's Overseas Office) that despite the large Vietnamese population in Siam, the number of "active" revolutionaries was relatively quite small. He reiterated that because Vietnamese communities were concentrated in certain, known locations in the northeast, it was easy for the Siamese police to make arrests. According to Hoan, "almost all of the Party's main cadres" were arrested by Siamese authorities during this time. Hoan cited the Phichit incident in September 1930, when hundreds of Vietnamese were rounded up and revolutionary bases there were destroyed for good. Lastly, and probably most importantly to the ICP leadership, he pointed out that if things continued to deteriorate at this rate, the capacity of the SCP to aid the Indochinese revolution, which really meant the Vietnamese one, would be severely undermined.188

II.4.2. The SCP's Assistance to the Indochinese Revolution

Hoan's last point is important. In 1930-1931, worker strikes, peasant demonstrations and boycotts were common in Vietnam. Beginning in the last half of 1930, autonomous "red villages" (sometimes called "soviets") were set up in the Nghệ-Tĩnh area under the encouragement of local ICP branches. The French struck back by sanctioning a violent crack-down on the villages in this area and the communist leadership in particular.189 Despite calls by some communists for an uprising against the French, by mid-1931 not only had the soviet movement been crushed, but the ICP apparatus itself had suffered badly with a large number of its leaders either killed or imprisoned. Many of those able to escape found their way to Siam.

As these cadres were bringing news of the repression to Udon, Lê Tân Anh arrived in Siam from China. Anh was a close associate of Hồ's, who had first come to Siam in the early 1920s and had had a hand in the formation of the Thanh Niên in Canton. In meetings between Anh, ICP members who had recently fled Vietnam, and members of the Udon Committee, it was decided that a committee should be created to assist the Indochinese revolution from Siam during this difficult time. In charge of this committee entirely. That the ICP continued to push the Siamese revolution, even though it was aware of the stringent Siamese crack-down on Vietnamese activities in Siam, see: 'Cựu Tế Độc Dòng Dương Văn Dòng, 28 March 1935' [Red Aid for Indochinese Activities], VKD, 1930-1945, Vol. I, p. 559.

188 Hoang Văn Hoan, op. cit., pp. 93-94. Hoan says that Tạp told him that Trần Văn Chấn had not informed him of this matter in Hong Kong a year earlier.

would be members of the SCP and some of those revolutionaries who had fled to Siam. As an individual who actually participated in these events, Hoan says the tasks of this body were divided into the following three parts: 1) to provide safe housing and recovery centres for those cadres seeking shelter in Siam; 2) to open training centres for those cadres still lacking in theoretical studies and revolutionary experience; and 3) to create conditions to allow cadres to return to Vietnam as quickly as possible to rebuild bases in Vietnam. The Siamese Commission supported the Provincial Committee's moves to support the ICP and gave the Provincial Committee this specific responsibility, citing it as the international duty of the SCP to help the Indochinese revolution.190

To achieve the three abovementioned goals, in early 1932 the Udon committee instructed Lê Mạnh Trinh and Nguyễn Văn Dự to organise what soon became known as the Indochinese Assistance Section (Dương Viên Trợ Bù).191 Lê Mạnh Trinh writes in his memoir that numerous overseas Vietnamese families agreed to shelter and care for cadres fleeing to Siam. Vietnamese fishermen and farmers donated food and equipment, while carpenters employed their countrymen as assistants. In another case, Vietnamese in Nakhon Phanom developed a longer term assistance programme by renting land from local Siamese which was specifically set aside for sustaining those cadres coming to Siam to escape French repression.192 According to Hoan's account, after a while the Indochinese Assistance Section was able to provide shelter to cadres seeking refuge in Siam as well as to garner funds for their travel requirements. Money, reportedly amounting to five thousand baht during this time, was contributed by Vietnamese communities in Siam to finance the care of these cadres. Secondly, because a majority of those seeking refuge in Siam lacked revolutionary training, centres were set up in such places as Ban Mai to give instruction in revolutionary theory. In fact, the political programme and regulations of the ICP were reportedly brought to Siam for the first time during this period and were used in training sessions.193 As Trinh puts it, the overseas Vietnamese bases in Siam "became a University for those comrades" fleeing French repression in Indochina.194 He goes on to say that the assistance provided by the SCP to the Indochinese revolution during this time—specifically, 1932-1934—was important in that it was one of the major links between surviving revolutionary outposts in Vietnam and the ICP leadership positioned abroad until formation of the ICP's Overseas Commission in Hong Kong in 1934.195

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190 Hoang Van Hoan, op. cit., pp. 67-68 cited in consultation with Weng Tocirakan, op. cit., p. 142.
191 Hoang Van Hoan, op. cit., p. 68 is the main source, with reference to Gunn, op. cit., pp. 56-57; T.C., op. cit., pp. 23-24 and CVDCQ, pp. 43-45.
192 CVDCQ, p. 44.
193 Hoang Van Hoan, op. cit., p. 69. The political programme was brought to Siam by Lê Lộc and Trần Xu, who were members of the Hà Tĩnh provincial committee. The Udon Provincial Committee was also able to provide cadres with research materials that either had not reached parts of Vietnam or were extremely hard to come by.
194 CVDCQ, p. 45.
195 Ibid., p. 45.
Before cadres went back to Indochina to resume their activities, a meeting was held in Ban Mai in 1933, with the participation of Nguyễn Văn Dụ, Lê Mạnh Trinh, Lê Lộc, Trần Xu, Bùi Khương, and Hoàng Văn Hoan. According to Hoan's account, Nguyễn Văn Dụ reported that the Siamese Commission "had agreed to form the Central Committee of the Indochinese Communist Party in order to administer the affairs of the Indochinese Party directly." It remains unclear what the exact status of this Committee was. It consisted of Nguyễn Văn Dụ (the secretary), Lê Mạnh Trinh, Lê Lộc, Trần Xu, and Bùi Khương. Without attribution, American historian, Milton Sacks, says that there was not one single representative from Tonkin attending the Ban Mai meeting, and, contrary to Comintern directions, the Central Committee it created was located in Siam. Sacks says the Committee aimed to rebuild the Party in northern Vietnam and to set up a training camp at Ban Mai. Not until after the meeting ended, Hoan wrote decades later, did he understand that the Bangkok Commission's policy was only that it would assist those who had come to Siam to make contact with the ICP and not, presumably, to form a Central Committee on Siamese soil. Upon learning of Hái's undisciplined action, the Siamese Commission criticised him and expelled him from his post in the Indochinese Assistance section. As for the Section, it had to be reorganised after a number of its members were captured by the French in 1933 and 1934.

Lastly, the strengthening of bases in Laos was another responsibility of the Indochinese Assistance Section. Since 1930 the Udon provincial committee had helped the branch of Thanh Tiến in Vientiane make the change over to communism. When the French stepped up their repression in Indochina in the early 1930s, the Indochinese Assistance Section dispatched representatives to Laos to work among Vietnamese miners in Boneng and Phong Chiu. Links were also formed with overseas Vietnamese bases in Thakhek, Savannakhet, and Pakse. By September 1934, the Indochinese Assistance Section was in charge of Party bases in Vientiane, Phongchui, Boneng, Thakhek, 196 Citing Thai Communist Party sources, Flood has written that this meeting "set up a provisional Executive Committee." Flood, op. cit., p. 44, fn. 27. 197 Hoang Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 70, with reference to French sources cited by Gunn, op. cit., p. 53. French intelligence reported that this meeting was held in April 1933 and that resolutions were passed calling for better links with the Party in Annam and Cochinchina. A "Provisional Executive Committee" of the ICP was elected, consisting of Nguyen Duy Tieu, Le Khanh Du, Le Mạnh Trinh, Hai Di Bay, and Tran Xu [as spelled by the French]. See: Gunn, op. cit., p. 54. 198 Milton Sacks, 'Marxism in Vietnam' in Frank N. Trager, Marxism in Southeast Asia: A Study of Four Countries, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), p. 133. 199 Hoang Văn Hoan, op. cit., pp. 70-71. Lê Lộc, Trần Xu, Bùi Khương, and a number of others were later captured by the French when they returned to work in Indochina. Hoang Văn Hoan, op. cit., pp. 70-71 and Gunn, op. cit., p. 54. According to Hoan, the new members of the Indochinese Assistance Section were: Lê Mạnh Trinh, Ba Đức (Ngô Tuan), and Tài (probably Nguyễn Tài). Hoang Văn Hoan, op. cit., pp. 70-71. Another possible member was Hoàng Luân. T.C., op. cit., pp. 23-24. 200 Hoang Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 71, cited in consultation with a Lao source, Sichana Sisan, 'Kan Surop thi Thathek' [The Struggle in Thathek] in Suphot Dantrakun, Caw Suphanouvong: Phumam Patiwat [Prince Souphanouvong: A Revolutionary Leader], trans. from Lao into Thai, (Nonthaburi: Sathaban Wihiyasat Sangkhom, 2533 [1990]), p. 14, which confirms that an ICP cell was set up in Vientiane during this time.
Savannakhet and Paksé and brought about the creation of the provisional Lao Regional Committee (Xứ ưy Ái-lao Lâm thòi).²⁰¹

In contrast, from the evidence available Vietnamese communists in Siam made few, if any, efforts to build party cells among Vietnamese émigrés in western Cambodia, a factor which would have important ramifications for post-WWII Vietnamese interests in Cambodia. In part, this difference reflected the strategic fact that up to this point the orientation of resistance activities in northeast Thailand had been toward northern Vietnam and southern China as opposed to southern Vietnam. The geographical location of major Lao towns in northern Indochina, positioned between northeast Siam and northern Vietnam, made Laos (and its large urban-based Vietnamese communities) relatively more important than those in Cambodia during the same period. In addition, the location of almost all the important Vietnamese resistance bases in northeast Siam were in Udon, Nong Khai, Sakhon Nakhon, and Nakhon Phanom frontier provinces, all of which were opposite Laos and not Cambodia. As far as we know, there were no notable bases in the pre-WWII period in provinces bordering Cambodia, such as Ubon Ratchathani, Surin, or Prachin Buri (see Map III). Although some of the top leaders of the ICP worked out of southern Vietnam during the 1930s, it appears that Vietnamese revolutionary leaders in Siam made no significant policy changes allowing for the building of bases among Vietnamese communities in Cambodia or for the establishing of contact with Vietnamese communist cadres active in southern Vietnam during the 1930s.²⁰² The orientation of Vietnamese activities toward the north was also related to the fact that the overwhelming majority of the top cadres working in northeast Siam prior to WWII were from Nghệ-An or Hà-Tĩnh provinces.²⁰³

But despite northeast Thailand's proximity to northern Vietnam, valuable Vietnamese revolutionary resources were being diverted to promoting a Siamese revolution. It seems likely that, to at least some Vietnamese leaders in Siam, this was a disturbing trend. To them, the importance of supporting the Vietnamese revolution from Siam probably took precedence over promoting a Siamese revolution during the early 1930s, despite the


²⁰³ The following leaders who worked in Siam all came from Nghệ-Tĩnh provinces: Phan Đình Phùng, Trần Hữu Đức, Phan Bội Châu, Đặng Thúy Hường, Quỳnh Ánh, Đặng Tự Kính, Phạm Hồng Thái, Lê Hồng Phong, Hồ Tùng Mậu, Hồ Chí Minh, Đặng Thảo Thụyên, Hoàng Văn Hoan, and Nguyễn Tài. Võ Tùng was from Quảng Ngãi. As we shall see later, the leadership makeup in Siam changed after WWII.
dominant international proletarian line in the ICP in 1935. This might have been more the case among cadres in northeast Siam who were no doubt more attuned to the needs of the Vietnamese revolution and less interested in promoting a revolution among workers in Bangkok. As we have shown, not until 1930 did Vietnamese revolutionaries in Siam pay any real attention to effecting a revolution in Siam. Before that, Vietnamese resistance concerns had focused on anti-French activities. Moreover, a number of the senior leaders in the Udon Provincial Committee had been trained by Hồ Chí Minh in Canton and had been working to assist the Vietnamese revolution from safe bases in Siam well before 1930. They were usually well-informed of developments in Vietnam and were in frequent contact with cadres going to-and-from there. It is hard to believe that a majority of these cadres would have compromised their work for the Vietnamese revolution in favour of promoting a Siamese one, especially when one considers the social unrest which was high throughout Vietnam during this period and the difficulties involved for a non-Siamese minority to preside over such a major Siamese social transformation. Hoan says that communist cadres imprisoned in Ban Khwang in 1936-1937 raised this topic for debate, but their prison-based conclusions were considered as unofficial by un-named SCP members on the "outside." At best, we can conclude from Hoan's trip to China to meet with leaders in 1935 that there was some degree of opposition to the idea of the Vietnamese promoting a Siamese revolution, with one of the major concerns being its negative effects on their ability to aid the Vietnamese revolution.

What remains largely a mystery is: 1) who, exactly, was in charge in the Commission in Bangkok (Chinese or Vietnamese cadres)?; 2) what was the extent of the influence of the "international" line over SCP leaders in the Bangkok and northeastern areas?; 3) what was the relationship between Udon and Bangkok communist organisations and to what degree could the northeastern leaders make decisions independently of the Bangkok Commission? Until more evidence comes to light, these questions remain unanswered.

Returning to Hoan's report to ranking ICP cadres in China in 1935, it is unclear what steps the ICP took in response. However, judging from the subsequent shift in the SCP's line away from supporting a Siamese revolution, it is possible that the ICP's new strategy—put forth in mid-1936 and stressing the importance of a broad-based political and social front for national liberation—had a part in this change. By 1936, the

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204 Hồ Tại Văn Hoàn, op. cit., p. 76.
205 Relying on French Sûreté reports, Geoffrey Gunn has concluded that during 1936-1937 there "was a split engendered between the SCP at the Centre and the Northeast Regional Committee of the SCP" over the importance of Indochinese affairs. Gunn, op. cit., p. 84. Citing a Sûreté report, Gunn claims that before his arrest in 1936 Trần Văn Chán "had actually succeeded in provoking a split between the SCP Party centre and the Northeast Region Committee." Gunn, op. cit., p. 85. Without providing hardly any more details, Gunn fails to show how Chung provoked this split and from the paucity of evidence available, I am not prepared to make such a bold conclusion until more information comes to light, especially from Vietnamese, Thai, and/or Chinese sources.
206 For a discussion of this period, see: Huỳnh Kim Khánh, op. cit., pp. 218-25.
Chapter 1

Overseas Office of the ICP is said to have lost most of its links with the Siamese Commission because the majority of the SCP's bases in Siam had been destroyed and its leadership imprisoned.\textsuperscript{207} While Trinh does not go into details, he writes in his memoir that from 1935 Vietnamese organisations in Siam "were dissolved one by one."\textsuperscript{208} Meanwhile, with the victory of the Popular Front (1936-1939) in France in 1936, political repression was relaxed in Indochina. Vietnamese opposition papers were sold openly in Laos, calling on the overseas Vietnamese to help China fight Japan. Trinh said that during this liberal period the headquarters of the Vietnamese resistance in Siam was transferred to the Lao town of Thakhek.\textsuperscript{209}

In 1938, the Siamese Commission allegedly decided that the "Siamese revolution" would have to be realised through the work of the Siamese. From that point on, Hoan says, it was decided that "foreign nationals could only participate in their own patriotic organisations;" the Vietnamese could not be expected to carry out this responsibility.\textsuperscript{210} By 1938-1939, it seems that the inappropriate, Comintern-inspired emphasis on the importance of promoting a Siamese revolution had indirectly undermined the Vietnamese capacity to assist its own revolution from Siam by bringing about the incarceration of most of the Vietnamese communist leadership in Siam. As for the SCP's influence among the Siamese, it had very little success and its predominantly non-Siamese character, together with the Siamese suppression of Chinese and Vietnamese activities during the 1930s, contributed to its final disintegration and "refounding" as the Thai Communist Party in 1942.
Chapter 2

The War Years

While most of the 1930s saw Vietnamese resistance work in Siam deteriorate markedly, a small, though important, revitalisation of Vietnamese activities began during WWII. For Vietnamese revolutionaries still active in Siam at this time, the war created favourable conditions in two ways. On the one hand, following the fall of France to Germany in June 1940, Siamese leaders accelerated their plans to recover Indochinese territories lost to the French at the turn of the century. Japan certainly provided Bangkok with the backing it needed to pressure France to relinquish these territories in 1941; however, the Siamese government led by Phibun Songkhram also made policy changes designed to win over the support of the Lao, Cambodians, and Vietnamese. Although the new line taken by Phibun toward the Vietnamese was clearly intended to promote Siam's irredentist interests, these changes nevertheless had the effect of loosening up regulations governing Vietnamese immigration to Siam and contributed to creating conditions favourable to rebuilding Vietnamese resistance activities in Siam.

The second and most important factor resulting in a restrengthening of Vietnamese resistance activities in Siam during WWII was Siamese-Vietnamese cooperation against the Japanese at the end of the Pacific War. While Phibun would plot a course of firm alignment with the Japanese, his counterpart, Pridi Phanomyong, opposed such close cooperation. As we shall document in this chapter, a shared opposition to Japanese occupation facilitated direct collaboration between Hồ's Viet Minh and Pridi's Seri Thai. This wartime cooperation carried into the postwar period and was an important factor in the large-scale expansion of Vietnamese activities in Siam after WWII. In order to better understand how these two trends in Siamese politics contributed to a regeneration of Vietnamese resistance work in Siam during the war years, we will first discuss the Phibun government's changes toward the Vietnamese in relation to the Franco-Siamese border war of 1940-41. Thereafter, we will turn to an examination of the anti-Japanese links which led to collaboration between the Seri Thai and Viet Minh.
Chapter 2

Part I: The Franco-Siamese Dispute, 1940-41

I.1. Siam, Japan, and the Growth of Irredentism during the 1930s

The closer relationship which developed between Siam and Japan in 1940 had as its roots a decade of increasing economic and military cooperation. As the Japanese extended their influence throughout Asia during the 1930s, Siamese leaders paid close attention, assessing the changing balance-of-power in Asia and judging its effect on Siamese national interests. Japanese promises of "Asia for the Asiatics" and an "Asiatic League" found increasing sympathy among Siamese leaders unhappy with their unequal relationship with the European powers. In fact, planners of the 1932 change of government looked to Japan as a source of support. In June 1933, with the French and British openly sympathetic to the absolute monarchy, a young Phibun Songkhram secretly asked the Japanese Minister at Bangkok for arms and support of another coup to consolidate his faction's hold on power. While the Minister did not openly back the plan, his promise of economic assistance in the event of a successful coup earned Japan increased respect among many of Siam's subsequent leaders. In a meeting in Bangkok after the successful June 1933 coup, Phibun and others informed the Japanese Minister that they hoped Japan would support Siam's economic development. The Minister assured them of this, and subsequent events in the 1930s saw a remarkable strengthening in the economic and diplomatic relationship between these two countries.1

Coinciding with Siam's closer relationship with Japan was the growth of a Siamese nationalist movement increasingly focused on regaining territories in Indochina that the French had taken decades earlier. As we saw in chapter 1, in the Franco-Siamese treaties of 1893, 1904, and 1907 the Siamese court forfeited its claims to vast Lao and Cambodian territories. The hope of one day recovering these territories remained an important priority for Siamese leaders who sought to replace the absolute monarchy. Prawin Phamonmontri, a Siamese leader who studied with Phibun and Pridi in Europe during the 1920s, wrote in his memoir that discussions among young Siamese leaders in France during the 1920s focused both on ways by which the Siamese system of government could be changed and how the territories lost to France in Indochina could be recovered.2 Indeed, soon after the 1932 change of government, Siam's new statesmen

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2 Praiyun Phamonmontri, Chiwit Ha Phaendin khong Khaophacao [My Life Through Five Reigns], (Bangkok: Bannakit, 2518 [1975]), pp. 302-03.
began increasing their military preparedness with an eye on the territories lost to the French decades earlier. In 1934, it was reported by Prince Purachat that Siamese leaders had actually made secret military plans by which the territories would be retaken.3 This trend was given an added boost in 1936 when the Ministry of Defence published a map of Siam showing the "lost provinces" as a part of the country. Despite protests from the French and British, this map was circulated widely among the military and introduced in some schools.4 In 1935, Bangkok's Minister to Paris added to the polemic when he reportedly referred to the "lost" Lao and Cambodian provinces as "the Siamese Alsace-Lorraine."5 Meanwhile, a close associate of Phibun and Director of the Siamese Fine Arts Department, Wichit Wathakan, put his cultural and historical expertise behind the irredentist movement by publishing a number of popular plays and articles extolling the common heritage and racial affinity of the Thai, Lao, and Cambodians.6

Upon returning from a trip to Indochina in mid-1939, Wichit used French maps showing the large "Thai" populations throughout the region as evidence supporting his case for a change in the name of the country from Prathet Sayam (Siam) to Prathet Thai (Thailand). In doing this, Wichit hoped to promote the notion of a "Greater Thai Dominion" (Maha Aanacak Thai), a concept which was designed to link together all the Thai ethnic peoples under Bangkok's political leadership, including those outside of Siam's established borders.7 In 1939, Phibun announced that "Siam" would now be called "Thailand."8

I.2. The Beginning of the Franco-Thai Dispute

Worried by the growing irredentist movement in Thailand during the late 1930s, at a time when war was becoming more likely in Europe, the French proposed the signing of a mutual non-aggression pact in an attempt to maintain their existing hold on Indochina. In accepting the offer, Phibun informed Paris that one of the points he wished to see negotiated was the matter of revising France's claim to the whole of the Mekong River. On 12 June 1940, the Franco-Thai Non-Aggression Pact was signed. According to the Thais, there was an oral understanding that subsequent talks would include a discussion of the need to re-establish the Mekong River as the border between French Laos and Thailand, meaning that the French-held enclaves west of the Mekong, Luang Prabang and Paksé, would have to be returned to Bangkok. This was to be done by the time the non-

3 Barmé, op. cit., p. 112.
5 GB, PRO, FO 371/20302, 'Annual Report 1935.'
8 As noted in the Introduction, from this point we will use the term "Thailand" throughout the rest of the text in order to avoid possible confusion by making numerous name changes.
aggression pact was ratified. However, on 20 June France fell to Germany and the newly formed Vichy government took a much less flexible line towards Thailand.9

This hardening French position came as Japan loomed on Indochina's northern border. Phibun, who had staked much of his political future on the success of returning parts of Indochina to Thailand, became increasingly frustrated at the stubborn French position, fearing that unless progress were made soon, Indochina would fall to the Japanese before Thailand had time to make a claim to any territories. In early August, he informed the Japanese that the Thais were considering the need to take advantage of Japanese pressure on Indochina in order to realise Thai irredentia. By the end of September, public calls for return of the territories and French intransigence left Phibun with limited options. On 28 September, as Japanese military forces moved into Indochina, Phibun informed Tokyo that he had decided to rely on Japan. In exchange for Japanese assistance in recovering Indochinese territories from the French, Phibun said that Thailand would allow Japanese troops to cross Thai territory if necessary.10

One of the first signs of increased Japanese support for the Thais was in the supply of arms. In November and December, the Japanese dramatically increased their military assistance to the Thais, providing them with tanks, heavy guns, machine guns, and even 24 bombers.11 With the Japanese now supplying the arms and equipment which Phibun needed to pressure the French to make concessions on border territories, Phibun turned his attention to preparing for possible armed conflict with the French in Indochina. As part of these preparations, Phibun sought to gain the support of the peoples of Indochina.

Part II: Phibun's Attempts to Garner Vietnamese Support

Phibun Songkhram was one of the first contemporary Thai leaders to voice public support of Vietnamese independence. Although his motives for promoting such backing derived from a desire to regain Indochinese territories and was but a side-show to his more important dealings with Japan, his new policies toward the Vietnamese nevertheless resulted in more favourable conditions for the Vietnamese resistance in Thailand. Like many leading Vietnamese nationalists, Phibun had studied in France and had respect for French cultural and political achievements. However, when it came to colonial France's mission civilatrice, Phibun shared much of the antipathy that Vietnamese anticolonialists held for the French. In this connexion, it is worth mentioning an incident, recorded by

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Praiyun in his memoir, when Phibun and Praiyun were returning to France after completing a trip to Germany sometime in the 1920s. Arriving at the border, they were stopped by a French border official who, in Praiyun's recollection, "contemptuously asked if it weren't true that our country was a colony of the French Government in Indochina." Although the two were able to convince the official otherwise, the Frenchman persisted, telling them that Thailand "was an abyss, full of fleas, and how could we know any better." To be "civilised," the official concluded, Thailand "should be a colony of France." Enraged, Phibun is said to have warned the Frenchman: "Beware, for one day your worthless flea [Thailand] will bite France so that it rots through and through."12

II.1. Phibun's Line toward the Vietnamese

In 1940, Phibun intended to "bite" hardest in Indochina. Indeed, as plans were being outlined for recovering the "lost territories" during the 1930s, Phibun and others were re-evaluating Bangkok's policy toward the peoples of Indochina living along the Mekong River. One of the first signs of a changing view came in June 1937, when the Minister of the Interior, Thamrong Nawasawat, wrote Phibun, then Minister of Defence, that the government had begun a new policy toward Vietnamese, Lao, and Cambodians immigrating to Thailand. Thamrong informed Phibun that concerning the movement of Indochinese into Thailand, border officials had been instructed by the Ministry of the Interior "not to interfere with their entry or request papers." Thamrong informed Phibun that "the authorities have also been told to offer their assistance where available, without appearing too obvious or guaranteeing anything."13

In November, Phibun sent a letter to the Prime Minister, Phya Phahon, informing him that border authorities had reported an increase in the number of Vietnamese crossing into Thai frontier areas during the last two to three years. According to these reports, the Vietnamese and other Indochinese were seeking refuge in Thailand in order to escape high taxes and the repressive French government in Indochina. Phibun explained that the increase in the number of Vietnamese along the border was good for Thailand, for it would "increase our border population" opposite French Indochina.14 Phibun concluded his memo to the Prime Minister recommending that because the French were "trying to encourage their [the Indochinese refugees] return, we should encourage more to come [to

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12 Praiyun, op. cit., p. 103.
13 TNA, ff.1. 0201.37.6/1-11, 'Letter from Minister of Interior Thamrong Nawasawat to the Defence Minister Phibun,' 7 June 1938. In August 1937, the Thai Legation in Indochina reported to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the French resident at Battambang told local officials to offer a five year tax moratorium to returning refugees. See: TNA, ff.1. 0201.37.6, 'Head of Siamese Legation in Indochina to Ministry of Foreign Affairs,' 13 August 1937.
14 TNA, ff.1. 0201.37.6/11, Office of the Cabinet of the Prime Minister, 'Phibun to Phahon,' 8 November 1937.
Chapter 2

To this end, Phibun suggested a tax amnesty for those refugees coming to the Thai side.\textsuperscript{16}

One of the clearest indications of a changed view of Indochinese affairs came soon after the fall of France, when Thai newspapers stepped up their support of the Indochinese peoples’ claims to independence. Many papers made virulent attacks on French colonial rule and promised Thai support for those fighting the French. New words were used in print. Phrases, such as "oppressed," "enslaved," and "the yoke of slavery," were splashed across frontpages. In line with the accelerating irredentist movement, it was reported that the "summons" from Thailand's Indochinese "brethren" fighting against the French was likely to come almost immediately.\textsuperscript{17}

Amidst this increased nationalist fervour, Phibun made one of the first significant references to the Vietnamese in a 21 October speech, broadcast nationally:

> Apart from our Thai brethren, a tribute should be paid to our Asiatic brethren, namely, the Annamese [Vietnamese], both inside and outside Thailand, who support the Thai Government in its readjustment of the border line, very sympathetically.\textsuperscript{18}

Phibun's intent was to take advantage of a common Asian heritage and to play off anti-French sentiments, especially among the large Vietnamese communities living in northeast Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia, many of whom were located in the areas which the Thais sought to recover. With France's compromised position clearly in mind, Phibun continued:

> So when that time comes our Thai brethren in the Khmer regions, Laos and also the Annamese will be free and will be able to re-establish their countries anew, independently. And all our Thai brethren [that is, the Lao and Cambodians] will then be living together under the protection of our Constitution and under our Thai King. As for the Annamese, when they have become independent, they will be ruled by their King as in the days gone by before the French came and destroyed their independence.\textsuperscript{19}

Phibun's language referring to pre-colonial days would lend some credence to an interesting observation put forward by Thai historian, Charnvit Kasetsiri. According to this thesis, despite Phibun's own strong nationalist convictions, he and some of his military associates had little faith in the possibility of other, similarly motivated

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} See, for example, the \textit{Bangkok Times}, \textit{Prachamit} and the \textit{Bangkok Chronicle} from October to December 1940.
\textsuperscript{18} ‘Premier Addresses Thai Nation: No Stepping Back from the Course Which Has Been Set,’ \textit{Bangkok Times}, 21 October 1940.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 3.
movements developing in Indochina, ones which might have been opposed to Bangkok's territorial ambitions. Chamvit has suggested that in "many respects Phibun's policy can be seen as a revival of the traditional policy of the early Bangkok kings—attempting to exert Siamese imperial control over Laos and Cambodia ..." More evidence will have to be uncovered to test this proposition properly. However, it is possible that Phibun was less than willing to aid Vietnamese nationalist groups unless they were ones under his direct control. This might partially explain why, in July 1940, Phibun privately told the British Minister, Josiah Crosby, that although he had personally met Vietnamese nationalists to discuss their requests for military assistance, he had turned them down, even though he was convinced they were nationalists and not communists. Of course Phibun may have said this for Crosby's consumption and the possibility that he might have provided some secret military assistance to the Vietnamese cannot be ruled out. But whatever the case, the changes Phibun made in his attempts to garner Vietnamese support for his irredentist plans softened the previously tough line Bangkok had taken towards Vietnamese activities during most of the 1930s (see chapter 1).

II.1-1. Bangkok's New View of the Vietnamese

One way by which the Phibun-led government tried to incorporate Vietnamese into its fight against the French was in the recruitment of disenchanted Vietnamese soldiers defecting from the French colonial army. The French policy of forcibly conscripting Vietnamese soldiers to man the Thai-Cambodian front throughout 1940 was met with strong opposition. In November, Vietnamese soldiers in Saigon opposed a French order sending them to the front. The Thais, who had a consul in Saigon, seem to have been aware of such protests by the Vietnamese, and sought to exploit this dissatisfaction to their own advantage. In October, Phibun told Crosby that he was sure that the "revolt of the native population in Indochina was imminent," citing an unspecified revolt of 250 Vietnamese troops in Indochina. To foster such anti-French actions, Bangkok stepped up its propaganda efforts in western Indochina and began anti-French radio broadcasts in Vietnamese, urging Vietnamese soldiers to desert their French units. It seems that one

21 GB, PRO, Telegram No. 275 from Crosby (Siam) to Foreign Office,' 27 August 1940.
22 In January 1939, the British Minister at Bangkok reported to London that during 1938 the number of persons arrested for distribution of leaflets was falling. He said that it was only occasionally that a Chinese or Vietnamese was subject to the strict anti-communist laws. See: GB, PRO, FO 2390/2390/40, 'Annual Report, 1938: Sir J. Crosby to Viscount Halifax,' 25 January 1939, pp. 8-9.
25 GB, PRO, FO 'Telegram No. 396 to Foreign Office,' 29 October 1940. See also: GB, PRO, 'Telegram No. 302 from British Minister in Bangkok to Foreign Office,' 6 September 1940.
26 Operations Division, RTA [Royal Thai Army], *The Unit Organization During the Indo-China Conflict and The Great East Asian War* (Washington: Office, Chief of Military History of the Department of the
of the first significant defections came in late October when an undetermined number of Vietnamese colonial soldiers (probably numbering from 50 to 100) crossed the Mekong into Thailand. In November, more Vietnamese troops were reported to have arrived in Thailand from Vientiane with a "large quantity of arms and ammunition." These troops, allegedly "disgusted" with the French, presented themselves to Thai officials in the northeast. Interestingly, Thai military officials met these defectors and organised a special train to transport them back to Bangsue, a Thai military camp outside of Bangkok.27

One Vietnamese soldier to defect to the Thais during this period and an individual who would play an important role in subsequent resistance activities in Thailand was Vù Hưu Binh, a former warrant officer in the French Garde Indigène in Vientiane. Fluent in Lao and Thai, Binh was commissioned as a lieutenant in the Royal Thai Army (RTA).28 Because of his former service in the French colonial army in western Indochina, he was familiar with French operations and provided the RTA with valuable intelligence on French positions there.29 His fluency in Thai and anti-French views also made him a potential liaison between the Bangkok government and the large Vietnamese communities situated along the Mekong. During his time in Thailand, Binh reportedly made connections with senior Thai military leaders, including Field Marshal Phin Chunhawan, an important Thai military leader who later aided the Viet Minh.30 One Vietnamese scholar who worked in Thailand after WWII and is knowledgeable with the period indicated that Binh's anti-French views and language skills attracted the personal attention of Phibun Songkhram, who met Binh sometime in the early 1940s (probably in late 1940).31

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27 'Refugee Army Arrives Here,' BC, 20 November 1940, p. 1. In December 1940, 50 Vietnamese soldiers, including two officers, were interned in Udon. Thai authorities reportedly gave them new uniforms and told them to learn Thai. See: GB, PRO, Telegram No. 372 (222/314/40), from British Legation (Siam) to Foreign Office,' 24 December 1940.


29 Interview with Trần Văn Đình, 20 June 1990, Washington, DC.

30 Ibid.

31 Interview with Hoàng Nhật Tân, 29 May 1989, Hanoi. It is possible that Phibun provided some sort of aid to the Vietnamese through Binh. However, because Binh was a member of the RTA and because Phibun probably considered him to be a part of his own plans, this would not necessarily be in contradiction with the earlier suggestion that Phibun may not have aided Vietnamese resistance groups other than those under his direction. More research will have to be done to test this hypothesis. Under similar circumstances, Phibun also met with Thao Oun Chananikon, a Lao nationalist who Phibun put to work in the propaganda office in the war of words against the French. Thao Oun Chananikon,
Besides working in the Thai army, Binh also worked with Vietnamese leaders of surviving communist cells in northeast Thailand. One of Binh's most important tasks in this connexion was to mitigate the negative effects of Japanese repression on the overseas Vietnamese communities in the northeast. Although he was not a communist member in 1940, his Thai connections were probably useful to communists in the northeast. It is worth noting here that a large number of those Vietnamese who had been imprisoned by Thai authorities at the Ban Khwang gaol during the 1930s (see chapter 1) were mysteriously freed by the Thais between 1942-1944, including veteran communist leaders of the overseas Vietnamese in Thailand, Nguyễn Chân and Quyền Anh.

By freeing these Vietnamese leaders from prison, the Thais unknowingly contributed to a rebuilding of Vietnamese resistance activities in northeast Thailand. Chân, who had long worked among the émigré communities, immediately resumed his work in northeast Thailand, revamping Vietnamese organisations which had deteriorated during the 1930s. In his work, Chân stressed the need to increase "mutual help" (tròng tê), the study of quốc ngữ, and to bring about greater "đoàn kết" (linking up together) among the Vietnamese in Thailand. Whether or not Binh was instrumental in effecting the release of these Vietnamese is unknown; however, the possibility cannot be ruled out.

In another instance, the Thais gave Vietnamese activities in Thailand an added boost—both symbolically and in real terms—when authorities arrested and held without bail Đỗ Hưng, the Vietnamese intelligence officer who worked at the French legation in Bangkok. Besides being suspected of spying on sensitive Thai military operations, Hưng had been the pointman for French surveillance of Vietnamese resistance activities in Thailand for over twenty-eight years. He had provided the Sûreté with information leading to the arrests of key ICP members in Thailand during the 1930s, including Võ Tùng and Đặng Thái Thuyên. On 14 March 1941, Đỗ Hưng was sentenced to death but the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment upon a plea of guilty. 

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Khwamlang khong Khaophacao Thao Oun "Tin yen" Chananikon [The Past Experiences of Thao Oun "Cold Feet" Chananikon], Trans. from Lao into Thai by Paphat Phothiyanon, (Bangkok: Duang Kamon, 2520 [1977]), p. 54.
32 Interview with Hoàng Nhật Tân, 5 May 1989, Hanoi.
33 CVDCQ, p. 51; Son Tùng, op. cit., p. 155; and Interview with Hoàng Nhật Tân, 5 May 1989, Hanoi.
34 CVDCQ, p. 51 and Interview with Hoàng Nhật Tân, 5 May 1989, Hanoi. At the end of 1944, Bà Quyền Anh was released from Ban Khwang.
35 CVDCQ, p. 51.
36 See: 'Annamite Official of French Legation will be Deported,' BC, 7 November 1940, p. 5; GB, PRO, FO No. 51, 84/1/40, 'Communism: Thailand,' 25 January 1940 in CRS A981/1; France 81B, AA; 'Đỗ Hưng Sent to Court: Case is Postponed,' 19 November 1940, p. 1; 'Đỗ Hưng's Brother Arrested: Espionage Activity Suspected,' BC, 18 November 1940; and 'Đỗ Hưng Had Extra Tasks for Legation,' BC, 20 January 1941, p. 1. For evidence of Đỗ Hưng's intelligence activities from Vietnamese sources, see: Son Tùng, op. cit., pp. 117-22, especially p. 118; Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 111; and Phan Bội Châu, Niên Biên, p. 111.
II.1-2. The Free Khmer and Free Indochina Parties

In late November 1940, Bangkok's widening interest in Indochinese affairs was underscored by the formation of a heretofore unprecedented Thai Department of Indochina Affairs in the Ministry of the Interior. The sudden need for this department was indicated by the great haste with which the government rushed the bill through the National Assembly on the 21st. There was little debate and it was accepted in principle unanimously on the very same day. In discussing the bill with members of the Assembly, a spokesman explained that one reason for the establishment of this Department would be to make a "study and investigation of administrative and other conditions in Indo[c]hina." He said that the "other reasons for the establishment of the Department . . . were well known to the members and . . . there was no need to mention them again."37 One assumes Bangkok had preparations to win over the support of peoples in Indochina in mind as well.

On 19 December 1940, as armed incidents proliferated between French and Thai forces along the Indochina border, the Bangkok Chronicle announced in a front page headline that "Annamites, Laos, and Khmers are Thai brethren." This article reported that according to a statement by the Thai Ministry of Defence, Vietnamese refugees coming into Thailand would no longer be considered foreigners, but rather "Thai brethren from Annam [Vietnam]."38 The next day, it was reported that the Cambodians, under the leadership of a Thai-speaking Cambodian, Phra Phiset Phanit, were organising a "Free Khmer Party" (Phak Khmer Issarak) to oust the French from Indochina and to restore Cambodian independence. This movement was said to have had the support of "many well known [Thai] personalities."39 On the 22nd, a meeting was held in Bangkok during which Phanit was selected the leader of the Free Khmer Party.40 According to Phanit, this organisation was established, funded, and supervised by the Thais.41 Before concluding his inaugural address to the Khmer Issarak on the 22nd, Phanit thanked the Thai government and the Premier for "the right to hold the meeting, the right to organise

37 'New Indochina Affairs Dept. in Interior Ministry Shortly, Assembly Passes Urgent Bill,' BC, 22 November 1940, p. 1 and BC, 26 November 1940.
38 'Annamites, Laos, and Khmers are Thais' Brethren,' BC, 19 December 1940, p. 1. A frontpage article in Prachamit informed the Thai public that they should not refer to their "Thai brothers" fighting for independence from the French as "rebels groups" (phuak kabot), because this term implied negative connotations and illegitimacy. Prachamit insisted that these resistance fighters be referred to as "revolutionaries" (phuak patiwat). See: Prachamit, 20 December 1940. See also: 'Annamites, Lao, and Khmers Are Thai's Brethren,' BC, 19 December 1940, p. 1.
39 'Khmers Here Organise for Independence,' BC, 20 December 1940, p. 1 for the quote and cited in conjunction with 'Phra Phiset Phanit pen Phunam Damnenkan' [Phra Phiset Phanit is the Leader of the Movement], Prachamit, 20 December 1940 and 'Khmers at Mass Meeting Start Freedom Drive,' BC, 23 December 1940.
40 The Unit Organization, p. 14 and 'Khmers At Mass Meeting Start Freedom Drive,' BC, 23 December 1940.
41 Interview with Phra Phiset Phanit by Steven Heder, 3 June 1981, Bangkok, Thailand. I am grateful to Steven Heder for providing me with a copy of the transcript of his interview with Phanit.
the Independent Khmer Party [Khmer Issarak] and in giving them every help in accordance with the policy in which H.E. the Premier [Phibun] firmly believed."42

Meanwhile, on the 21st, Bangkok had created yet another anti-French organisation known as the Independent Indochina Party. Though its exact function remains unclear, this party was reportedly designed to give "active support and assistance in the campaign for the restoration of independence now carried out by the people at Lang-sorn [sic] in North Annam and at Saigon in South Annam."43 By singling out the Vietnamese cities of Langson and Saigon as specific destinations for Thai aid, Bangkok had the recent Vietnamese uprisings at these two locations in mind and perhaps sought to win over increased Vietnamese support by mentioning them. As noted above, Thai leaders were certainly following events in Indochina closely, convinced that revolt was imminent. Interestingly, one of the tasks of the Independent Indochina Party was to "supply arms to soldiers and civilians in Indochina who may need them to fight for their cause."44 Unfortunately, it has been difficult to verify how much aid the Thais actually provided to the Vietnamese through this organisation.

II.1-3. Changes in Immigration Laws

Meanwhile, because of Franco-Thai border skirmishes in late 1940, a large number of Indochinese refugees began to cross into northeast Thailand. Responding to this influx, on 20 December the Ministry of the Interior sent circulars to border officials in northeast Thailand concerning the government's decision to relax immigration laws on Lao, Cambodians, and Vietnamese entering the country. This change was made, the Ministry said, "in order to be in consonance with the Government's policy in its justifiable request for territorial concessions from French Indochina."45 By exempting Vietnamese immigrants from having to pay fees for issuing or renewing alien registration papers, the Ministry made it easier for them to cross into Thailand. As an announcement described Bangkok's new view of the Vietnamese:

According to Article II, a special concession in regard to alien registration fee is granted to the Annamites [Vietnamese]. This is because the Annamites are a race inhabiting the Golden Peninsula, just like the Thai nation. In former days Annam was an independent country in the Golden Peninsula. Later on, she lost her independence unjustly and became a French colony. The Ministry of the Interior considers the Annamites to be inhabitants of a former independent country, so, from now on, in the

42 'Khmers At Mass Meeting Start Freedom Drive,' BC, 23 December 1940.
43 'Independent Indochina Party Will Be Established Here Soon,' BC, 21 December 1940, p. 1.
44 BC, 21 December 1940, p. 1. According to Thadeus Flood, the French alleged that Thai agents played a role in the Langson affair. See: 'Japan's Relations,' op. cit, p. 368.
45 'Suanyuan Chai Chatyuan Iae Yunai Bangkhapyuan' [The Vietnamese are now Considered Vietnamese Nationals under Vietnamese Authority], Prachamit, 22 December 1940, p. 1 for the quote and cited with reference to 'Indo-China Brethren Exempted from Aliens Registration Fee Here.' BC, 23 December 1940.
census or in any dealings with them, the authorities shall treat the Annamites as being of the Annamite race and nationality and as Annamite subjects [and not French].

On 29 December, the Thai Broadcasting Station issued an official communique reiterating Bangkok's recognition of a future independent Vietnam, free of the French:

We would like to see the entire Annamite people getting back their independence soon. Now in Thailand we regard the Annamite as independent people in every way. We no longer regard them as French subjects with French nationality. We treat them as Annamite subjects with Annamite nationality.

In exchange for these changes, however, Bangkok hoped to maintain the support of the large Vietnamese communities in northeast Thailand and western Indochina in the fight against the French. As the Ministry of the Interior put it, changes in Vietnamese immigration were made

so that they may fully understand that the Thai Government sympathizes with them . . . and that they should return the good wishes by cooperating with the Thai Government in every way. But the most important point is that they shall in no way perform any action that may benefit the French and be detrimental or dangerous to Thailand.

By early 1941, some thirteen thousand Indochinese refugees were reported to have arrived in Thailand. In response, the Thai government dispatched the head of the Department of Indochina Affairs to northeast Thailand and urged Thai citizens to help their "brethren" by contributing to a "refugee fund." Interestingly, some of the main contributors to this fund were high-level members of the Ministry of Defence.

II.1-4. The Establishment of the Free Indochina Army

Coinciding with this support, on 5 January 1941 the Thai High Command announced a Free Indochina Army (FLA) would soon be formed. According to official Thai Radio, numerous letters had been received by the Thai government from Vietnamese expressing "their desire to restore the independence of Vietnam and urging Thailand to organise such

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46 BC, 21 December 1940, p. 1 and Prachamit, 22 December 1940. It will be recalled that since the 1893 Treaty the Thais were obligated to recognise the Vietnamese coming into Thailand as "French subjects." See chapter 1, section I.

47 'Statement by the Thailand Broadcasting Station,' December 29, 1940 in GB, PRO, FO, Telegram No. 383 (222/334/40), December 30, 1940 in CRS A981/1; France 4, AA.

48 Prachamit, 22 December 1940. The Thai fear that the Vietnamese might do something to benefit the French was almost certainly a reference to possible Vietnamese spies working in northeast Thailand for French intelligence. See: CVDCQ, p. 50.

49 'Influx of Refugees Continues, Over 13,000 Until February 8,' BC, 10 February 1941, p. 1. See also: 'Chanthaburi and Aranyaprathet] Crowded by Refugees,' BC, 6 February 1941, p. 1.

50 'Further Contributions to Refugees Aid Fund,' BC, 12 February 1941. This group included: Police General Adun Decharat, Colonel Luang Chawengsak Songkhram, Phya Sundon Phiphit, Colonel Phra Ramnarong, and Prince Sakon Worawan [Voravan].
a force to aid the purpose." Referring to Vietnamese soldiers in the French colonial army, a report in a Thai daily explained that many soldiers serving the French in Indochina did not want to fight the Thais. In fact, they were said to have wanted to join the Thai army but did not know if the Thais would admit them.

On the 6th, the governor of the northeastern province of Ubon Ratchathani, Police Colonel Phra Klaklang Samon, called a special meeting of Vietnamese representatives in the area to explain how the government planned to help them recover their independence and how legal changes would contribute to this. In a speech to this gathering, the colonel announced that the Thai government would help the Vietnamese in Indochina recover their independence by fostering the creation of an independence army. Secondly, Bangkok would relax regulations on Vietnamese activities in and immigration to Thailand. Lastly, the Colonel explained that the "Thai government now trusts the Vietnamese and is happy to admit them into the army and police in order to conquer the French." The potential importance of these changes to the state of the Vietnamese resistance in Thailand is obvious; however, it remains unknown whether surviving Vietnamese resistance organisations in northeast Thailand realised this or could even take advantage of it at the time considering the damage the resistance leadership had suffered during the 1930s.

On the 15th, Thai Radio announced that the FIA had been successfully organised and was ready for action "in collaboration with the Thai Armed Forces" to regain Indochina's independence. The government urged the Vietnamese to join at provincial offices or military outposts along the frontier. From the evidence available, it was the Thai Ministry of Defence that presided over the formation of the FIA, both arming and training it. The FIA's membership was comprised of Vietnamese (some of whom later joined the Viet Minh) and Cambodians, with no Lao members, according to Phra Phiset Phanit. The FIA went into battle with the Thai Army in early 1941, allegedly outfitted with at least one machine-gun battalion. It remains unknown who or exactly how many Vietnamese actually joined the Free Indochina Army. It is likely that it was a relatively

51 Phra Sanong Khamkho khong Chawyuan [In Response to Requests from the Vietnamese], Prachamit, 7 January 1941, p. 1 and 'Indo-China Army Here,' BC, 6 January 1941, p. 1.
52 Kholuang Ubon Naenam Hai Chaw Yuan Tang Kongissaraphap Khun [The Governor of Ubon Invites the Vietnamese to Form an Independence Force], Prachamit, 17 January 1941.
54 Phra Sanong Khamkho khong Chaw Yuan [In Response to Requests from the Vietnamese], Prachamit, 7 January 1941, p. 1 and 'Indo-China Army Here,' BC, 6 January 1941, p. 1.
56 Interview with Phra Phiset Panit by Steven Heder, 3 June 1981, Bangkok.
small number, probably not exceeding more than a few hundred overseas Vietnamese volunteers and soldiers who had deserted the French colonial army.

II.1-5. The Indochina Communist Party's View of the Franco-Thai Conflict

Before concluding this section, it is worth noting that in November 1940 the 7th Central Committee Plenum of the ICP opposed the Franco-Thai war. Most worrisome were French efforts to conscript Vietnamese by force to send them to the front to fight the Thais. As we have noted, many Vietnamese were adamantly against the idea of fighting for the French. The slogan, "Don't Go to the Front to Die for the Thai and French Colonialists," was popular among Vietnamese soldiers during this time. Secondly, the ICP leadership seems to have been worried by Thai irredentist designs on western Indochina. In the opening of the "Declaration of the Viet Minh Independence League" in May 1941, the Thai government was referred to as the "lackey of the Japanese" which had been given "ten percent of Indochina." As this document said in part:

The French have given 70,000 square kilometres of Indochinese territory to the Siamese. They see us as a gift to be sold. Thus, our people have become the beasts of burden for the French, the servants of the Japanese, and the slaves of the Siamese. Hồ Chí Minh himself expressed unhappiness at the loss of territory to the Thais. In a June 1941 letter to the Vietnamese people, Hồ criticised the French for deciding that they could "take our land" (đất dai của ta) and give parts of it to Thailand.

While it is extremely difficult to gauge the inner-thinking of the ICP concerning this matter, it is not impossible that the ICP may have been informed through representatives in Thailand that although Phibun shared their antipathy for the French, he would not militarily support an alternative Vietnamese resistance outside of his control. If we can believe Phibun's words to Crosby, we know that sometime before mid-1940 Phibun had turned down a request for military aid from a group of what he called "Vietnamese

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61 Ibid., p. 48.
62 Thư của cụ Nguyễn Âi Quốc Gởi về Nước Nam 1941 (6 June 1941)[A Letter from Nguyễn Âi Quốc to His Homeland, 1941; also known as 'Kính Cáo Động Bạo' [A Respectful Letter to My Countrymen]], translated into Vietnamese from Chinese and printed in Nền Độc Lập [Independence], (Thủ Đức: Hội Tấn Văn Hỗ, n.d.); as reproduced by Trần Huy Liệu, Vol. 10, op. cit., p. 61 and cited with reference to another translation by Minh Trần and Hoàng Lương in 'Độc Lập Thư "Kính Cáo Động Bạo" của Nguyễn Âi Quốc (vìệt ngày 6-6-1941)' [Another Reading of the Letter, "A Respectful Letter to My Countrymen," by Nguyễn Âi Quốc], NCLS, No. 249, (February 1990), p. 49. Both these translations use the Vietnamese phrase: "đất dai của ta" ["our land"]. However, another translation of this same letter, reproduced in Hồ Chí Minh, Tuyển Tập [Hồ Chí Minh, The Collected Works], (Hanoi: NXBST, 1980), pp. 321-23, specifically p. 321, leaves out the "của ta" ["our's"], reading: "... đất cho Xiêm" ["... land given to Siam"].
nationalists." Another, and perhaps more plausible, possibility is that because of the remote location of the ICP's leadership in northern Vietnam and southern China during this time, the ICP may have had little, if any, contact with cadres in northeast Thailand, and was thus unaware of the potentially favourable conditions created by Phibun's abovementioned policies. Nevertheless, for those anti-French Vietnamese living outside of the ICP's purview along the Mekong, the Thai-created Free Indochina Army and other anti-French changes offered natural alternatives through which they could fight the French. In addition, the loosening of regulations governing Vietnamese activities in Siam allowed those remaining Vietnamese cadres in the northeast, such as Nguyễn Chấn, to begin rebuilding resistance organisations.

II.2. Japanese Mediation and the Outbreak of the Pacific War

In the end, it was Japan that reined in Thai irredentist ambitions in Indochina. Most disturbing to the Japanese was the possibility of full-scale war between France and Thailand in January 1941. Since late 1940, both the French and Thais had violated each others' air space, with both sides exchanging threats to bomb each others' cities. On 16 January 1941, the Thais launched a ground attack against French forces in Cambodia. This attack was largely successful, with many Vietnamese defecting to the Thais as their army pushed twenty-five miles into Cambodia. However, the French struck back the next day with a surprise attack on the Thai navy, handing the Thais a major set-back.63

At this point, the Japanese accelerated their mediation of the conflict, informing the Thais that they would pressure the French to halt the fighting in exchange for an "understanding with the Thai regarding a Japan-Thai pact." The complex details concerning this matter have been covered by Flood. What is important here is to recognise that throughout the mediation negotiations of early 1941, the Japanese sought to bring an end to the conflict in a way that promoted their interests in Southeast Asia, and that Thai and Japanese interests did not always coincide. On 11 March, after weeks of intense negotiations, an agreement was signed under Japanese auspices in Tokyo. According to this agreement, France was obligated to return to Thailand all territories lost under the 1904 Treaty (Paksé and Luang Prabang), the provinces of Battambang, Siemreap, and Sisiphon up to the Tonle Sap, but not the town of Siemreap or Angkor Wat. While the French conceded that the deep-water channel would form the riverine border, the Thais, under Japanese pressure, had to demilitarise all areas turned over to them.66

63 'Japan's Relations,' pp. 397-422, especially p. 416.
64 Quoted in Ibid., p. 423.
65 See Flood's dissertation, 'Japan's Relations,' chapters 11, 12, and 13.
66 Ibid., pp. 553-54.
By relying on Japan in the Franco-Thai dispute, Phibun soon found himself under increasing pressure from Tokyo to align with Japan as the Pacific War drew nearer. In November his attempts to keep Thailand neutral became more difficult as the Japanese prepared to move against British colonies in Malaya, Singapore, and Burma. On the 28th, Phibun told his cabinet that in the event war were to break out between Japan and the Allies, Thailand should join Japan, for Thailand would regain more territory in Indochina and would suffer less if the Japanese were victorious. After a mysterious trip to the northeast, Phibun returned to Bangkok on the morning of 8 December to consider a Japanese ultimatum. In a cabinet meeting that morning, Thai troops were ordered not to resist the Japanese. The Japanese informed the Thai cabinet that they were expected to allow Japanese forces to cross Thai territory. In the end, as Japanese troops crossed through Thailand to attack Burma, Malaya, and Singapore, the Thais opted to cooperate with Japanese military operations rather than join a formal military alliance.67

However, Phibun subsequently decided to move even closer to Japan. After imposing martial law and reshuffling his cabinet, to include easing Pridi out of the Cabinet and giving him a powerless seat in the Council of Regency, a Japanese-Thai military alliance was signed in the sacrosanct temple of Wat Phra Kaew in Bangkok on the 21st. Four days later, Thailand declared war on both the United States and Great Britain.

Part III: Seri Thai-Viet Minh Cooperation

III.1. The Origins of the Seri Thai and Viet Minh: A Brief Review

Phibun's firm alignment with the Japanese was not supported by all Thais. In fact, Bangkok's Ambassador in Washington, Seni Pramot, refused to hand Phibun's declaration of war over to the US, insisting that it did not represent the will of the Thai people. Meanwhile, in Thailand, Pridi and a number of his close associates began to organise an underground resistance movement to work against the Japanese. Directing affairs from his post as Regent, this resistance group eventually developed into what became known as the Khabuan Kan Seri Thai (The Free Thai Movement). Designed to attract a wide section of Thai society, this resistance organisation was created to fight the Japanese and regain Thailand's independence.68 In 1942, the US State Department was informed that the Seri Thai was "an underground revolutionary group which at a

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propitious moment would seize power and free the country from the Japanese yoke and the control of its present leaders."69 Pridi explained in a speech to the Thai public at the end of the war that the Seri Thai movement "was not set up as a group or a political party, but rather a[s a] cooperation of the Thai people struggling to regain our national independence status as it existed before the Japanese invasion on December 8th 1941 [sic]."70

In Vietnam, Vietnamese nationalist leaders also sought the broad support of Vietnamese society during WWII. In February 1941, Hồ Chí Minh returned to Vietnam and in May he presided over the creation of the Viet Minh, short for Việt Minh Độc Lập Đồng Minh (The League for the Independence of Vietnam). This resistance organisation was formed with the aim of attracting a wide range of supporters, regardless of class, in the fight against the Japanese and in the struggle for independence. Earlier ICP stress on "class struggle" and "proletarianism" was abandoned in favour of a policy emphasising broad-based cooperation. As the Viet Minh's most important guide-line read:

_Policy:_ Unite all the social classes, revolutionary parties, and patriotic peoples' groups
in order to drive out the Japanese and French bandits, thereby making Vietnam entirely
independent through the formation of a Democratic Republic of Vietnam.71

Significantly, the Viet Minh's political programme also noted the importance of cooperating with Asian neighbours in the fight against the Japanese.72 And from mid-1944 onwards, the Viet Minh headquarters singled out the importance of "linking closely with fellow Southeast Asian revolutions" and organisations to create favourable conditions for a successful uprising for national independence.73

### III.2. Changes in Overseas Vietnamese organisations in Thailand

As discussed in the previous chapter, during the 1930s the Vietnamese communist leadership in northeast Thailand had suffered badly because of arrests brought on by the SCP's policy of promoting a Siamese revolution. By the end of the decade, around a hundred Vietnamese communists had been imprisoned, including most of the SCP's top leaders. According to a Lao source, the ICP's communist cell in Thakhek (which had

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70 Pridi, _Political_, p. 71.
73 _Ibid._, p. 96.
taken on added importance in the late 1930s) had also disintegrated following the arrest of most of its cadres in the early 1940s.\textsuperscript{74}

In this context, the decision by Vietnamese leaders in 1941 to shift their emphasis from the ICP's formerly narrow class line to the Viet Minh's broad, united front strategy must have been a welcome development. However, it must be noted that news of the Viet Minh's new policy did not reach Vietnamese leaders in northeast Thailand until 1943 at the earliest.\textsuperscript{75} Sometime in this year a number of Vietnamese cadres fled to Thailand to escape increased Japanese and French repression in Vietnam. These Vietnamese, the first of them from Quảng Bình province in central Vietnam, brought with them copies of the Viet Minh Political Programme. According to Lê Mạnh Trinh, this was the first time the party cells in Thailand had been able to gain concrete information about the Viet Minh.\textsuperscript{76} Once the political programme was available, it was spread among overseas Vietnamese organisations in Thailand.\textsuperscript{77}

One of the most important results of this was the creation of national salvation associations (Hội Cựu Quốc), mass organisations which were designed to link groups of Vietnamese society—artisans, Buddhists, students, etc.—into the wider Viet Minh front. Of those formed in Thailand, the Hội Việt Kiều Cựu Quốc (The Overseas Vietnamese National Salvation Association) was the most important and had the widest links to the overseas Vietnamese. "Within a few months," Trinh says this Overseas Vietnamese Association was able to attract Vietnamese members from old organisations, urging them to "Fight the French and Drive out the Japanese." Another Vietnamese newspaper, Độc
Lập (Independence), was printed in Thailand and disseminated widely among the large Vietnamese communities along the Mekong River. However, despite the introduction of the Viet Minh political programme, Trinh concedes that the Vietnamese leadership in Thailand was still unable to establish direct links with the Viet Minh General Bureau (Tổng Bộ) in the hills of northern Vietnam.78

Things changed, however, after the Japanese overthrew the French in Indochina in a *coup de force* on 9 March 1945.79 This *coup* signalled the Japanese need to take direct control of Indochinese affairs in preparation for a possible Allied attack. With Germany defeated in Europe, the US was turning its full attention to the war in the Pacific. In mid-1945, the US began dispatching OSS teams to Thailand and Indochina to gather intelligence on downed pilots, prisoners-of-war, and Japanese troop movements. To both the Seri Thai and Viet Minh, US actions created favourable conditions for their independence movements and simultaneously gave rise to a sense of urgency in their activities. Although the US counselled Pridi to avoid launching an uprising, both Pridi and Hồ stepped up their resistance operations against the Japanese, working directly with OSS teams, supplying them with valuable intelligence on Japanese positions and Allied prisoners-of-war.80 Fearing the return of European colonialism as much as the Japanese by this time, Pridi and Hồ were aware that as the end of the war approached, they had to be able to demonstrate to the Allies the strength of their organisations as ones capable of ruling postwar, independent states.

Following the March *coup*, the Vietnamese were able to strengthen their resistance work in northeast Thailand considerably. With French intelligence no longer capable of monitoring Vietnamese activities along the Mekong River as closely as before, the Vietnamese moved more freely in the area and strengthened links between overseas Vietnamese organisations in Laos and Thailand. However, while French repression of the Vietnamese had subsided, it was allegedly replaced by a Japanese crack-down on Vietnamese resistance activities in Laos. There the Japanese accelerated their efforts to win over the support of local Vietnamese communities to the Japanese-backed Trần Trọng Kim government. While Lê Mạnh Trinh reports that Vietnamese resistance leaders along the Mekong were able to counter this effort, he concedes that they had a

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78 CVDCQ, p. 52. Flood claims that the Hội Việt Kỷu Cầu Quêc was based in Sakhon Nakhon. Flood, op. cit., p. 36. I have been unable to confirm this.
80 On 12 May, an OSS team was parachuted into northeast Thailand to work with the Seri Thai until the end of the war. For more details, see: US, OSS, 'Sleeve Operational Report by John S. Holladay,' 27 September 1945, RG 226, E154, USNA. In July, a similar OSS mission left for Indochina. See: US, OSS, 'Report on Deer Mission by Major Allison Thomas,' 17 September 1945, RG 226, E154, Box 299, Folder 3377, USNA.
much harder time with the pro-Japanese Dai Việt (Greater Vietnam) party, which had expanded its influence among the Vietnamese in Laos after the March coup.81

Even more pressing, however, was the fact that as of April 1945 Vietnamese leaders in Thailand had still been unable to establish direct contact with the Viet Minh headquarters in northern Vietnam. Without instructions from the Viet Minh General Bureau, the leadership in Thailand was unsure of how they were to respond to new and rapidly changing conditions. Guide-lines defining Vietnamese cooperation with the Seri Thai was an area of particular uncertainty, especially as the Seri Thai stepped up operations in northeast Thailand in mid-1945. Viet Minh adherents in Thailand were also in the dark as to how they were to work with the newly born "national liberation movement of the Lao people," the Lao-pen-Lao (Laos for the Lao Movement).82

III.3. Seri Thai-Viet Minh Cooperation Begins, April 1945

According to Trinh, following the March coup de force, the General Association of the Overseas Vietnamese in Thailand (Tổng Hội Việt Kiều Thái-lan) dispatched a representative to northern Vietnam to establish direct relations with the Viet Minh General Bureau.83 A simultaneous decision was made to establish relations with the Seri Thai, evidently without waiting for instructions from the General Bureau. Because of this decision, the Vietnamese in Thailand were soon given assistance by the Seri Thai and the Lao-pen-Lao.84 According to the Vietnamese scholar, Hoàng Nhật Tân, Pridi directed Seri Thai leaders to form secret "anti-Japanese resistance zones" in northeast Thailand in 1945. As a part of this plan, Pridi contacted Nguyễn Chấn to request overseas Vietnamese assistance. Tân confirmed in an interview that the overseas Vietnamese in Thailand "supported Pridi" in the formation of these bases, known as chiến khu (fighting zones) to the Vietnamese. While details are limited, Tân indicated that Pridi helped the overseas Vietnamese to establish a chiến khu in Na Kae.85 This is confirmed by another Vietnamese scholar, Trần Xuân Câu, who states that the Na Kae base was established in April 1945.86 Nakae is a small, northeastern Thai village, located along the

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82 CVDCQ, p. 52. For more details concerning the Lao-Pen-Lao, see: Gunn, op. cit., pp. 127-31.

83 It seems likely that the Tổng Hội Việt Kiều differed from the Hội Việt Kiều in that it was the headquarters.

84 CVDCQ, p. 52.

85 Interview with Hoàng Nhất Tân, 5 May 1989, Hanoi

86 Trần Xuân Câu, op. cit., p. 32. Lê Mạnh Trinh also makes reference to these Seri Thai-assisted training camps for Lao and Vietnamese youths. CVDCQ, pp. 57-58 and also see: Dũng Bích Hà, op. cit., p. 163. This is the first concrete evidence historians have of direct Seri Thai-Viet Minh cooperation. Câu incorrectly states that Na Kae was in Sakhon Nakhon province. Trinh writes in his memoir that overseas Vietnamese youths were given military training in such bases in June and July 1945. CVDCQ, p. 38. Significantly, on 7 August 1965 the Communist Party of Thailand launched its first guerilla attack on
Mekong River south of Nakhon Phanom. It had become a Vietnamese resistance post in the 1920s, when it was first organised by Dặng Thúc Hạp and his associates.

According to Tấn, the Na Kae base consisted of twenty to thirty Vietnamese youths who made weapons. Cậu wrote that in the end the Na Kae base consisted of 120 Lao and overseas Vietnamese, armed with rudimentary weapons. Tân explained that this cooperation between the Viet Minh and the Seri Thai only lasted "a few months" before a decision was made by Pridi to abandon armed fighting in these zones which, in the end, had accomplished "very little." Pridi did supply some weapons to the Vietnamese during this period, though the quantity remains unclear but was probably small.

Thai sources are conspicuously quiet when it comes to discussing Thai-Vietnamese cooperation during WWII. However, Pridi hints in his memoir at possible Thai-Vietnamese cooperation.

A number of other Southeast Asian nationalists who were staying in Siam at the time [of the war] joined the anti-Japanese resistance movement [Seri Thai]. Their groups received training in the theory and practice of guerilla warfare from our resistance group [Seri Thai].

Interestingly, a September 1945 article in the Viet Minh's mouthpiece, Cửu Quốc (National Salvation), reported that during the anti-Japanese resistance the "overseas Vietnamese had supported the Siamese people competently in several guerilla battles." Presumably, with such cooperation in mind, Trinh wrote in his memoir that from mid-1945, "the longtime neighbours of Vietnam, Laos and Thailand became friends in the struggle against the common enemy: fascist Japan."

Besides this cooperation, Seri Thai leaders in the northeast also employed some Viet Minh cadres in their guerilla operations. Toward the end of the war, northeast politicians and leaders of the Northeastern Seri Thai Committee, Chamlong Daoruang and Tiang

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87 Interview with Hoàng Nhật Tân, 5 May 1989, Hanoi.
88 Trần Xuân Cậu, op. cit., p. 32.
90 Interview with Hoàng Nhật Tân, 5 May 1989, Hanoi.
92 'Quan Dtí Viet Kieu Hoát Dong & Xiêm-la' [An Overseas Vietnamese Army is Operational in Siam], Cửu Quốc, 22 September 1945, No. 40.
93 CVDCQ, p. 53.
Serikhan, worked directly with Viet Minh representatives in Thailand. Another northeastern Seri Thai official, Thongin Phuriphat, worked with Tiang to recruit Vũ Hữu Bình into a number of Seri Thai anti-Japanese operations in the region. By this time, Bình was a Viet Minh leader working along the Mekong River. A Vietnamese communist member in Thailand, Mai Văn Quang, was in contact with Chamlong Daoruang as well. While the details surrounding their cooperation remain sketchy, they were reported to have been friends by a Viet Minh representative who worked out of Thailand in late 1945.

Although it is unclear when exactly Vietnamese organisations in Thailand were incorporated into the Viet Minh hierarchy, Tân said that it occurred during the last months of the Pacific War. Trinh agreed, writing in his memoir that before the war ended, the Viet Minh General Bureau in Vietnam sent a special representative to Laos and Thailand to establish formal ties with overseas Vietnamese organisations. Two Overseas Vietnamese Special Committees (Đặc ủy Việt Kiều), one each in Laos and Thailand, were created under the "direct leadership" of the Viet Minh General Bureau and the General Association of the Overseas Vietnamese in Thailand before the war ended. Symbolising the increasing importance of Thailand to the Vietnamese independence movement as the war came to an end, in mid-1945 communist party branches in Laos and Thailand, following earlier instructions sent from the ICP Central Committee, dispatched representatives to northern Vietnam to attend an upcoming National Congress in Tân Trào.

Telephone communication with Trần Văn Dinh, 29 December 1990, Washington, DC.

Interview with Trần Văn Dinh, 20 June 1990, Washington, DC. It will be recalled that Mai Văn Quang had first come to Thailand when he was in his teens and had studied under Đặng Thúc Hứa and Hoàng Văn Hoan. A 1968 Vietnamese communist document stated that besides cooperating with the Allies during WWII, Pridi also "secretly worked with the Communist Party of Thailand [CPT]." In December 1942, the First Congress of the Party met to form the CPT and promulgate a political programme. According to this document, Thai communists considered this to be the official founding day of the Party, preferring to ignore the SCP's original formation in April 1930. See: 'Những Nẻ,' p. 37 and 'Congress of the Fourth Congress of the CPT,' in Weng Towicharakan, op. cit., pp. 25 and 140-43. The similarity to the Cambodian Communist Party's attempt to rewrite its original founding day, removed from its affiliation with the Vietnamese, is obvious.

CVDCQ, p. 53.

Chapter 3

War in Indochina

The period between the end of WWII and the outbreak of full-scale war in Indochina in December 1946 was a turning point in the expansion of postwar Vietnamese resistance activities in Thailand. With the war over, the Vietnamese had to consolidate their hold on power and simultaneously prepare for the possibility of French attempts to reinstate colonial rule to Indochina. In this chapter, we will turn our attention from an exclusive discussion of Vietnamese resistance activities in Thailand to an examination of the Indochina-wide security threats facing the newly formed Vietnamese government during the last half of 1945 and all of 1946. Because French action in Indochina was the major factor explaining the increasing importance of Thailand to Vietnam in the immediate postwar period, it is necessary to outline briefly the events leading up to the outbreak of war in Indochina in December 1946.

In this connexion, we will turn our attention to the Viet Minh's growing interest in protecting its western flank through intensified cooperation with the Lao resistance movement. As we shall see in the following chapters, the orientation of the Viet Minh's security thinking toward the west would influence the subsequent development of Vietnamese resistance activities in Thailand. As for Vietnamese resistance work in Thailand, we will limit our discussion here to an examination of immediate postwar Thai assistance to the Viet Minh during the last half of 1945. We shall also look at two Franco-Thai incidents along the Thai-Lao border in mid-1946 which were a part of Franco-Thai negotiations and in which the Vietnamese were directly involved. A detailed discussion of Vietnamese activities in Thailand in 1946 will be reserved for the next chapter.

Part I: The Strategic Situation up to December 1945

I.1. The Viet Minh Come to Power

At the Potsdam Conference in July 1945, the Allied powers decided that command boundaries in Indochina would be divided along the 16th parallel, with the Chinese in
charge of the northern part and the British responsible for the southern section. On 13 August, two days before the Japanese publicly accepted the Allied terms of unconditional surrender, a special ICP All-Country Congress opened at Tân Trào, a jungle base located in northern Vietnam. Three days later, Hồ Chí Minh presided over a National Congress there during which guide-lines were set by which the Viet Minh would seize power, establish a provisional government, and negotiate with the Allies. On 19 August, before Allied troops arrived to accept the Japanese surrender in Indochina, the Viet Minh came to power in Hanoi. Within a week, groups pledging loyalty to the Viet Minh held the upper hand throughout much of the country. On 25 August, the Vietnamese emperor, Bảo Đại, abdicated his throne, turning his symbols of power over to the Viet Minh on the 30th. Within a week of the official formation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) on 2 September, Chinese troops began pouring into Vietnam from the north, while British forces landed in the south.

The challenges to the newly formed DRV were immense. Internally, the government was a coalition of different parties and competing interests. While the communists held key positions in the DRV government, Hồ did not aim for a monopoly. The Vietnamese Nationalist Party (VNQDD), in particular, was suspicious of the communist credentials of several Viet Minh leaders and sought to expand its own power with assistance from its Chinese backers. In the south, the situation was even more complex. Immediately following the Japanese capitulation, the Viet Minh came to power in Saigon between 24 and 25 August and was represented through the People's Committee of the South (Ủy Ban Nhân Dân Nam Bộ). Headed by a veteran southern communist, Trần Văn Giàu, this committee was an uneasy coalition of communists, nationalists, and religious sects. In September, feuds inside the Committee led Giàu to resign the chairmanship. He was replaced by an independent, Phạm Văn Bách.1

The landing of Allied forces in Indochina further threatened the Viet Minh's hold on power. By late September, a 150,000 man Chinese army began to arrive to accept the Japanese surrender in northern Indochina. Far from stabilising the situation, this army was a collection of regular and irregular troops, often more interested in looting and profiteering than in disarming the Japanese. Moreover, Chinese attempts to foster a non-communist Vietnamese government put the Viet Minh provisional government under even more pressure. Yet no matter how much the Vietnamese might have detested this occupation by an age-old enemy, it was clear that the Chinese presence prevented the French from retaking northern Vietnam by force in September 1945. And as for the

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Chinese commanders in Vietnam, they preferred the Viet Minh to the French in order to protect their own economic and strategic interests.

The British did not share this view of the Viet Minh. Already pledged to help restore French authority to Indochina, in early September British and Indian troops under the command of General Douglas Gracey began arriving in the south to accept the Japanese surrender and to maintain order. Although this was the extent of Gracey’s task, he soon took it upon himself to release and rearm French troops who had been interned since March and to order the Japanese to disarm the Viet Minh. Subsequent bloody clashes occurred between the French and Vietnamese in Saigon. On 21 September, Gracey declared martial law. On the 23rd the French, with British collusion, engineered a *coup de force* that forced the Viet Minh out of Saigon and into the countryside. War had begun in Vietnam below the 16th parallel.

From September to early 1946, the French strengthened their military positions in Nam Bồ (the Vietnamese term referring to southern Vietnam) and southern Trung Bồ (central Vietnam). With troop reinforcements arriving in October, the French advanced into the countryside, taking control of most of the main towns, roads, and ferry crossings. Meanwhile, the Viet Minh continued to lose important allies among the nationalist groups and its fragile relationship with the religious sects deteriorated further. In late 1945, main Viet Minh groups were forced to retreat to remote areas in the Plain of Reeds and areas along the Vietnamese-Cambodian border.2

As for Cambodia, on 10 October the French entered Phnom Penh and, with the help of the British, overthrew the newly independent government led by Son Ngoc Thach. A French-backed government was quickly installed; and in January 1946 King Sihanouk recognised French sovereignty over Cambodia.

**I.2. French Action in Laos, August to December 1945**

Of particular worry to leaders of the DRV immediately after the war were French attempts to retake all of Laos, despite the fact that most of it fell above the 16th parallel and was thus to be administered by the Chinese. Following the March 1945 Japanese *coup de force*, over five thousand French colonial troops under the command of General Major Marcel Alessandri had fled to Yunnan province in southern China. Positioned along the Sino-Lao border in August, these troops were awaiting permission to return to Indochina to re-establish French authority to Indochina. Control of Laos would have provided the French with a strategic backdoor through which to attack DRV adherents in northern Vietnam. In addition, there were about five hundred French-led guerrillas active

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in the Lao countryside in August. Former French colonial soldiers who had remained in Laos after the March coup, these guerillas subsisted off the land and launched minor hit-and-run operations from the countryside, never seriously threatening Japanese power. However, with the end of the war at hand, they assumed added importance as French military leaders tried to use them as symbols of French colonial authority in Laos.

On 16 August 1945, French partisans were instructed to occupy immediately administrative centres throughout Laos, both above and below the 16th parallel. The French, with the help of the British, retook the southermost portion of Laos falling below the 16th parallel, including an important airbase in Paksé. As for the area above the 16th parallel, the delayed arrival of the Chinese encouraged the French in their bid to regain control of the rest of Laos. In direct violation of the Potsdam agreements, on 28 August French guerillas captured the royal capital of Luang Prabang, gained the Lao monarch's recognition of French sovereignty, and took over administration of the city. Despite orders from OSS officials demanding withdrawal of French forces in Laos to the area south of the 16th parallel, the French did not comply.

Yet French efforts to regain other towns in northern Laos posed a more formidable task. During the last half of 1945, French guerillas were unable to retake and hold Vientiane, Thakhek, or Savannakhet. Though they could dispatch representatives to tend to French citizens in these locations, their attempts to take them by force were hindered by a combination of OSS and Chinese opposition and joint Viet Minh and Lao defence units.

In late September, the Chinese began to arrive in Laos, reaching Luang Prabang first and then slowly making their way southwards. In charge of accepting the Japanese surrender and administering affairs in Laos was the 93rd Division, a force numbering around twenty thousand men. The 93rd was a collection of regular and irregular troops, civilians, and stragglers who, as in Vietnam, were often more interested in profit-making than in attending to the matter of disarming the Japanese. While the Chinese allowed the French to remain in Luang Prabang until December, the French found Chinese commanders in Laos at this time unwilling to help them restore their authority to other Lao towns. At the end of the year, the Chinese looked the other way as Lao and Viet

7 Caply, op. cit., p. 282 and Trần Xuân Cűu, op. cit., p. 33.
8 The figure of twenty thousand comes from three sources: Đặng Bích Ha, op. cit., p. 175; Interview with Trần Văn Đình, 20 June 1990, Washington, DC; and Caply, op. cit., p. 282.
Minh armed groups encircled the small French force barricaded in Luang Prabang. Following unsuccessful attempts to gain Chinese intervention, on 4 January the French abandoned Luang Prabang, leaving the major towns of Laos above the 16th parallel under Chinese supervision, with Viet Minh and Lao resistance forces still able to continue strengthening their positions there. In contrast to Nam Bô, by the end of 1945 and during the early part of 1946 Viet Minh forces in Laos were concentrated in towns along the Mekong, while small, under-supplied French units were forced to take up guerilla tactics in the surrounding forests, waiting for reinforcements from Saigon and more favourable conditions for an attack on Lao urban centres.

As in northern Vietnam, the Chinese presence in Laos during late 1945 acted as a safeguard for the Lao Issara and the Viet Minh. For one, KMT forces impeded most French efforts to re-instate their colonial rule to Laos above the 16th parallel. Secondly, the Chinese took little interest in suppressing the anti-French activities of the Viet Minh or Lao Issara in Laos. The Viet Minh was able to expand its military presence in Laos and to build stronger links to the Lao resistance and overseas communities, largely free of French interference. This was in stark contrast to Cambodia, where French reoccupation in October 1945 had made Viet Minh military operations and collaboration with anti-French Cambodian forces extremely difficult.

I.3. The Strengthening of the Viet Minh Position in Laos

The Viet Minh's interest in strengthening its western positions in both Thailand and Laos can be dated back to the period before the end of the Pacific War. The first visible sign of this came in early to mid-1945 (probably in late April or May) when a special ICP representative sent to Thailand by the Central Committee instructed Party branches in Thailand and Laos to dispatch participants to the upcoming Congress at Tân Trào. With time of the utmost importance, the Thai ICP branch selected Trần Dúc Vinh (also spelled Vịnh) and another delegate known only as Khieu to go to Tân Trào, while the

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11 In late November 1945, an ICP Central Committee directive pointed out the danger in Laos, unlike Nam Bô, was that the Lao and Vietnamese were only in control of the towns, while French guerillas operated unhindered in the countryside. See: 'Chì Thi cua Ban Chấp Hành Trung Ương Đảng về "Kháng Chiến, Kiên Quế,"' (dated 25 November 1945) [The Party Central Committee's Directives concerning 'Resistance and Nation Building'], Văn Kiến Đảng về Kháng Chiến Chung Thúc Đán Pháp, Tập I (1945-1950) [Party Documents concerning the Resistance Against French Colonialism, Volume I (1945-1950)], (Hanoi: NXBST, 1986), p. 37 [hereafter cited as VKD, 1945-1950]. Though the ICP had publicly been self-dissolved in November 1945, it continued to function clandestinely.

12 Vietnamese historians of Laos have conceded this point, writing that the Chinese presence in Laos was "a factor blocking a French advance." See: Đăng Bích Hà, op. cit., p. 176.

13 Trần Xuân Câu, op. cit., p. 39, makes this point as well.

14 This is another early and important factor contributing to the different directions which subsequently emerged in Vietnamese-Lao and Vietnamese-Cambodian relations.

15 Son Tùng, op. cit., p. 163; CVDCQ, p. 53; Interview with Trần Văn Đính, 20 June 1990, Washington, DC; and Hoằng Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 254. According to Son Tùng, Quỳnh Anh was initially selected to attend the Tân Trào congress, but, because she did not know how to ride a bicycle and time was short,
Lao Party branch sent Dương Trí Trung. These three immediately set out on bicycles for the hills of northern Vietnam. According to a ranking ICP delegate who was at Tân Trào, we know that Vinh and Trung made it to Tân Trào in enough time to take part in the ICP All-Country Congress. Vinh, in particular, was a notable selection. In the late 1920s, his father had been a communist cadre in northeast Thailand who had been trained by Hồ Chí Minh. A party member himself, Vinh had lived and worked in northeast Thailand since the mid-1930s.

Besides setting the guidelines for taking power, during meetings at Tân Trào Hồ also raised the possibility that the arrival of the Allies in Indochina might presage a full-scale French attack on Vietnam. Describing a worst case scenario, Hồ pointed out the possibility that the French, with "the full support" of the Americans, the British, and the consent of the KMT, might attempt to retake all of Vietnam in the immediate wake of the war. Hồ said that in such a case the Vietnamese must be ready both to fight and to negotiate. Concerning the possibility of a French attack, the Viet Minh were concerned by the presence of Alessandri's troops in southern China. With the end of the war at hand, Vietnamese leaders could not rule out the possibility that Allesandri might gain Allied permission to return his troops to Indochina. In such a case, the Viet Minh would face a threat of invasion from the west, through Laos and northwestern Bắc Bộ (the Vietnamese term referring to northern Vietnam).

This concern is evident in the resolution passed by the ICP All-Country Congress at Tân Trào on 15 August in which the problem of rebuilding ICP branches in Laos and Cambodia was singled out, with "special assistance to be given to the Lao Party branch." This would suggest that Vietnamese strategists at Tân Trào (who were mainly northerners) were more concerned with Laos than Cambodia at this point. Immediately after the congress, a "special representative" of the Viet Minh was sent to Laos to

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16 Interview with Hoàng Nhật Tân, 5 May 1989, Hanoi and Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 254. It will be recalled that Dương Trí Trung had studied under Đặng Thúc Hứa and Hoàng Văn Hoan in the late 1920s. Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 41.

17 Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 254. I do not know what happened to Khieu. Lê Mạnh Trinh claims that these delegates left Thailand/Laos "at the end of July." However, if at least two of the delegates made it in time for at least part of the ICP Congress, I find it very hard to believe that they could have left in late July and made it to Tân Trào by 13-15 August. They must have left Thailand earlier, considering the rugged and hilly terrain they had to cover. From the evidence available, there was no overseas Vietnamese representative from Cambodia at Tân Trào. It is possible that a representative had been selected, but, because of the distance, did not arrive in time to attend the congress. This was one of the reasons why there was no ranking member from the south at Tân Trào. Hoàng Văn Hoan joined the ICP Central Committee at this time and worked in the Việt Bắc zone after Tân Trào.

18 Interview with Trần Văn Đình, 20 June 1990, Washington, DC.


establish closer collaboration with the newly formed Lao independence movement. This delegate was Trần Đức Vịnh, the same delegate who had attended the ICP All-Country Congress on behalf of the Thai Party branch. Hồ was said to have appointed another representative at Tân Trào to travel to Thailand. This individual was Nguyễn Đức Quy, a member of the Viet Minh from Huế who had worked in northern Vietnam against the Japanese and rescued downed Allied pilots during the war. In making this selection, Hồ reportedly sought to appoint a polished, effective representative of Vietnam, someone who was multilingual, cultured, and not openly associated with the communist party. In this connexion, Quy was a member of the Vietnamese Youth League, proficient in French, English, Thai, and Chinese, and a member of the non-communist Democratic Party (Đảng Chủ Danh). Although it is unclear why Quy did not leave for Bangkok until a year later (see chapter 4), his selection by Hồ at the Tân Trào congress provides us with an early, postwar example of growing Viet Minh interest in Thailand.

The decision by the Viet Minh at Tân Trào to strengthen their positions in Laos was well calculated. General Alessandri did seek Allied permission to move his troops back to Indochina. And though his requests were denied by Chiang Kaishek, they nevertheless gave credence to Vietnamese fears of a French attack from the west. These concerns must have been given added weight when, as has been noted, fighting broke out between the Viet Minh and French forces in Laos in August and the French retook Luang Prabang on the 28th. In mid-September, Hồ confided to an OSS representative in Hanoi, Archimedes Patti, that the Viet Minh were deeply worried by the French military action in Laos. A former Viet Minh military officer who began working in Laos in October 1945, said in an interview in 1989 that Hồ considered Laos to be a strategic "buffer for northern Vietnam," protecting it from a French attack from the west after WWII. According to Patti, Hồ also believed that French forces in Laos were "attempting to infiltrate northern Viet Nam through that rear area" and, as far as Hồ was concerned, an "undeclared war" had begun between the French and Vietnamese in Laos. In response to this situation, the Viet Minh began "developing a plan of operations for a protracted conflict against the French." Hồ ordered his new Minister of Defence, General Chu Văn Tấn, to strengthen Vietnamese forces in the "southern sector along the Mekong." Hồ may have had the strategic French airbase in Paksé in mind when issuing this instruction. In early

23 Interview with Trần Văn Dinh, 31 December 1989, Washington, DC. 
24 Interviews with Nguyễn Đức Quy, 5 April 1989, Hồ Chí Minh City; Trần Văn Dinh, 31 December 1989, Washington, DC; and Hoàng Nhật Tân, 5 May 1989, Hanoi. The Democratic Party was a part of the Viet Minh coalition. 
26 Patti, op. cit, p. 348. 
27 Quoted in Ibid., p. 348. I have been unable to determine who or what, exactly, this plan involved. 
28 Ibid., p. 348.
November, an article in the DRV newspaper, *Dân Thanh* (People's Opinion), echoed this concern when it pointed out that French guerilla attacks on Savannakhet represented "an important strategy" used by the French "to cut off Indochina." 29

To consolidate defensive positions in Laos, the Viet Minh sought to widen its control over the thousands of overseas Vietnamese families residing there and to increase military cooperation with Lao resistance groups. According to Cứu Quốc, on 28 August, hardly ten days after the Tấn Trào National Congress had closed, a special representative of the Viet Minh General Bureau arrived in Savannakhet. Although this official was not named, he was almost certainly Trần Đức Vinh. Whatever the case, this delegate began meeting with Lao leaders discussing areas where joint cooperation should be developed against the French, with a joint military liaison and combined defence units soon formed. On the night of 28 August, he presided over a meeting of Vietnamese leaders from the Overseas Vietnamese National Salvation Association (*Hội Việt Kiều Cứu Quốc*) and the Overseas Vietnamese Friendship Association (*Hội Việt Kiều Thần Tài*) from Thailand and Laos. Participants considered ways by which their organisations could be united into a single, more effective entity. After some discussion, it was decided that the old Overseas Vietnamese Association would be incorporated into the newer Overseas Vietnamese National Salvation Association. Reforms were subsequently approved to align this enlarged body with Viet Minh guide-lines and Vietnamese communities in both Laos and Thailand contributed men and money to defence forces in Laos. 30

Hanoi further strengthened its ties with the Lao resistance movement through the assistance of the Lao nationalist leader, Prince Souphanouvong. Educated in France and Hanoi, Souphanouvong supported the idea of combined Vietnamese-Lao cooperation against the French. In early September, he was escorted to Hanoi by a Viet Minh representative to meet with Hồ Chí Minh and other ranking Vietnamese leaders concerning the need for wider Lao-Vietnamese military cooperation against French...
colonialism. In a meeting with an OSS officer, Souphanouvong said that he was in Hanoi "to make arrangements with Ho Chi Minh to support the Viet Nam government." Having been asked by Viet Minh leaders to form a joint Lao-Vietnamese military force, on 30 September Souphanouvong arrived in Huế with a letter from Hanoi to the Central Region Resistance Administration Committee. On instructions from Hồ, a small contingent of Viet Minh officials was chosen to escort Souphanouvong back to Laos. Among those selected was a young Vietnamese from Huế named Trần Văn Dinh, the deputy director for special operations of the Liberation Army General Staff. On 7 October, Dinh and Souphanouvong arrived in Savannakhet to begin work on creating a Lao Liberation Army.

This was not an easy goal. Firstly, few of these men had any real military experience. Secondly, some Lao leaders were undoubtedly troubled by the outpouring of Vietnamese support for the DRV in major Lao towns following the August Revolution, a development which rekindled historical ethnic animosities and threatened cooperation. On 30 August, in a move clearly designed to allay Lao ethnic distrust of the Vietnamese, a number of Vietnamese who had previously worked in the French colonial bureaucracy turned their jobs over to Lao counterparts. According to Dinh, Thao Oun Chananikon, a major Lao Issara leader who had close links with the Thais, was particularly suspicious of Souphanouvong and his entourage of Viet Minh advisers. Having taken control of Savannakhet, Oun and his supporters were reluctant to turn over leadership of the Lao independence movement to Souphanouvong. To Dinh, this problem left the Viet Minh considerably isolated from Lao forces under Oun's leadership and impeded Vietnamese efforts to strengthen their position in Laos through closer military cooperation with the Lao Issara.

To help solve this problem, Dinh said in an interview that he arranged a meeting between Oun and Souphanouvong shortly after arriving in Savannakhet, during which he

31 'Uayphon Wanket,' p. 2 and Interview with Trần Văn Dinh, 20 June 1990, Washington, DC. While it is unclear which side initiated the contact, the Viet Minh had links to Souphanouvong through Hồ Chí Minh's Minister of Transportation, Dào Trọng Kim. Kim was said to have been a good friend to Souphanouvong, the two of them having studied together in France. Interview with Trần Văn Dinh, 20 June 1990, Washington, DC.
32 'Interview with Prince Souphanouvong of Laos,' 19 September 1945, Office of Strategic Service China Theatre, SI Branch, APC 627 reprinted in Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Ninety-Second Congress, Second Session, 9, 10, 11 May 1972, Causes, Origins, and Lessons of the Vietnam War, (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1973), p. 305. Hồ Chí Minh and Bảo Đại were also present at this meeting.
33 Sichana Sisan, 'Kansurop,' op. cit., p. 15.
35 For more details concerning the ethnic mistrust impeding increased Lao-Vietnamese cooperation, see: Brown and Zasloff, op. cit., pp. 26-27 and 'The Birth,' p. 429.
stressed the importance of unity among the Lao leadership and between the Lao and Vietnamese. Dinh claims he proposed the formation of a general staff to administer to one, unified Lao army. On 8 October, at a Lao Issara congress in Thakhek, the Army for the Liberation and Defence of Laos was formed, with Souphanouvong and Oun's men forming the command and staff. Souphanouvong became the commander-in-chief of the army, while Oun took over as the second-in-command. As for Dinh, he became an adviser to Souphanouvong's Intelligence Service, a group he says soon grew "into an almost independent agency." On 12 October, the provisional government of the Lao Issara was formed.

As for the Vietnamese presence in Laos, it numbered in the tens of thousands and was concentrated in the major western towns situated along the Mekong River. One of those in charge of the Viet Minh’s military operations in Laos after WWII was Vũ Hữu Binh. Now stationed in Vientiane, Binh served as the Chairman of the Military Affairs Committee. Under his command, many of the 10,000 Vietnamese men and women there were enrolled in guerilla armies and people’s self-defence forces. Binh also worked directly with Lao military leaders, such as Souphanouvong and Thao Oun, whom Binh had come to know during his service in the Thai Army.

In late October, the Vietnamese further consolidated their military relationship with the Lao through a military agreement. After discussions between Lao and Vietnamese officials, on the 30th, Trần Đức Vĩnh and the Lao Prime Minister, Phaya Khammao, concluded a joint Lao-Vietnamese military treaty. Prince Souphanouvong said because of this agreement "Lao and Vietnamese military units would be combined to stand side-by-side against their mutual enemy, French colonialism." A Lao source says that the combined Lao-Vietnamese forces fielded around 600 men during this time.

On 25 November, the Viet Minh announced a three-fold plan for strengthening the Overseas Vietnamese National Salvation Association in Laos and Thailand. Firstly, Vietnamese in these two countries were called upon to link together more closely in the resistance against the French. Secondly, the association was instructed to protect the

38 Interview with Trần Văn Đình, 20 June 1990, Washington, DC.
39 The quote is Đình’s, 'The Birth,’ pp. 429-30.
40 In the six major towns of Laos, the Vietnamese held key positions in the bureaucracy and in some cases out numbered the Laos. In 1943, out of a total population of 51,150 in these towns, the Vietnamese numbered 30,300. Brown and Zasloff, op. cit., p. 27 and nrs. 29 and 30 on p. 378.
41 ‘Raven Mission,’ p. 22; Trần Xuân Câu, op. cit., p. 45, fn. 16; and 'The Birth,’ p. 433.
42 Interview with Trần Văn Đình, 31 December 1989, Washington, DC; ‘Raven Mission,’ p. 22; and 'The Birth,’ p. 433. According to an OSS report, a Vietnamese by the name of "Sin Truq" was in charge of Savannakhet and "Coung" [Curong?] was chief in Thakhek. See: ‘Raven Mission,’ p. 22.
43 ‘Hai Nước Lào-Việt Ký Môt Hiệp ước Liên Quân đế Chống với Kế Thu Chung’ [The Nations of Laos and Vietnam Sign a Military Treaty to Oppose Their Common Enemy], Đàm Thanh, 6 November 1945 and Brown and Zasloff, op. cit., pp. 31-33.
44 Quoted by Trần Xuân Câu, op. cit., p. 42, cited in conjunction with Caply, op. cit., p. 314.
45 Sichana Sisan, op. cit., p. 17.
interests of the overseas Vietnamese in Laos. And lastly, the Vietnamese were directed to
assist the Lao independence movement. Although there were certainly contradictions in
these instructions, on the 25th the ICP Central Committee nonetheless stated that the
"strategic responsibility" of the Vietnamese in Laos was to increase the level of armed
propaganda among the people in the countryside. In so doing, a "united Vietnamese-Lao
anti-French front" would bring about a "guerilla war" in the rural areas.

In November, Dinh reorganised the Intelligence Service in order to coordinate
Vietnamese-Lao military operations better, resulting in the creation of the Lao-Vietnamese
Allied General Staff based in Vientiane. Dinh became an adviser to the General Staff,
but in reality he claims he was the "actual head." By the end of 1945, the Viet Minh
had increased their control over the large Vietnamese communities in Laos and
strengthened their cooperation with the Lao Issara's key leaders. Significantly, both of
these tasks required the Viet Minh to run its Lao operations from western Laos, in the
towns directly across the Mekong River from Thailand.

I.4. Vietnamese-Thai Cooperation, August to December 1945

Across the Mekong in Thailand, Pridi Phanomyong was emerging from WWII as one
of the dominant figures in Thai political circles. Like Hồ Chí Minh in Vietnam, Pridi's
most important tasks after the war were to negotiate Thailand's independence and its
relations with the Allies. On 16 August, the day after Tokyo surrendered, Bangkok
formally repudiated Phibun's alliance with the Japanese and the January 1942
declarations of war on Great Britain and America. On 7 September, Pridi changed the
name of the country, "Thailand," back to "Siam." As for the Cambodian and Lao
territories Bangkok had gained in 1941, postwar Thai leaders continued to view this land
as a rightful part of the Thai nation. As the Prime Minister, Seni Pramot, remarked in
September 1945: France "is the last nation entitled to play the role of injured innocence
toward us," a sentiment shared by Thai public opinion at large. Indeed, while Bangkok
promised return of territories it had taken from Great Britain during WWII,
conspicuously absent was a similar pledge to return the Indochinese territories to the
French. It was in this context, as the French reasserted pressure on Bangkok to return
the Thai-held Indochinese territories, that postwar Thai leaders found themselves in a

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46 See: 'Việt Kieu o Ai-Lao voi Phong Tro Quoc Gia Doc Lap' [The Overseas Vietnamese in Laos in
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47 'Ch T... Khong Chien, Kien Quoc," 25 November 1945,' VKD, 1945-1950, p. 37. Yet, as we shall
see, the Vietnamese found it very difficult to fulfill these instructions, for their military forces in Laos were
concentrated in urban centres and had little contact with peoples living in the countryside. Moreover,
the Vietnamese in Laos could speak minority languages prevalent in areas outside the towns in which
they were located.

48 'The Birth,' p. 433.

49 Pridi Banomyong [Phanomyong], Tasks... op. cit., pp. 13-17.

50 Quoted by Harris Smith, OSS, p. 317.
position not unlike that of their Vietnamese counterparts in Hanoi. This shared antipathy for the French was a major factor in creating favourable conditions for Vietnamese resistance activities in Thailand after WWII.

There is no doubt that Pridi was one of the Viet Minh’s most powerful postwar allies in Thailand and a key figure allowing the DRV to administer military and political activities in Thailand immediately. Like Hồ, Pridi hoped to see an end to European colonialism in the region. Writing decades later, he reflected on the nationalist sentiment sweeping the region immediately after the war in the following terms:

After the Japanese had surrendered, the former Western colonial powers returned to rule their former colonies. However, upon returning they had to confront resistance movements led by nationalists in those formerly colonised countries. A certain number of these nationalists came to Thailand in order to ask for assistance from us. From the discussions I had with these nationalists, we came to the view that every country in Southeast Asia would soon have its independence.51

Aware of this sympathy, as well as Thailand’s troubled relations with the French, the Viet Minh sent special representatives to Bangkok to determine the degree to which new Thai leaders would support the DRV. In Pridi’s words:

At the end of the war, a Vietnamese patriot contacted me to make a request for arms. I allocated a certain amount of Seri Thai arms to the Vietnamese and, through khun Sangwon, the military police were employed to guard the loading of these arms onto a train and oversaw their transportation to the [eastern] border of Battambang, which at that time was still under Thai administration.52

Khun Sangwon was Thai Rear Admiral Sangwon Suwannanchip. During the war, he had been a high-level Seri Thai leader and a close confidant of Pridi in charge of all military police in Bangkok and the head of major naval bases. Following WWII, he became Deputy Minister of Defence in the caretaker government of Thawi Bunyaket and was subsequently appointed Adjutant General of the Armed Forces and then Chief of Police. He was later said to have had "absolute" control over the Free Thai arms "arsenal."53 Clearly, he was an important supporter for the Viet Minh to have on their side.

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51 Pridi Phanomyong, Chiwit, p. 88.
53 US, DOS, 892.00/8-2646, ‘Fortnightly Summary of Political Events in Siam,’ 26 August 1947, USNA.
The importance of such aid was not lost upon Hồ, who conveyed his gratitude to Pridi for the abovementioned military assistance. As Pridi describes it:

Hồ Chí Minh wrote me a letter thanking me for the arms and their transportation. He said that he had just formed two battalions of patriotic Vietnamese soldiers and would now give them the name: The Battalions of Siam.54

It remains unclear which "Vietnamese patriot" actually met with Pridi to arrange this arms transfer. However, Trần Văn Đình said in an interview that Trần Đức Vinh had made a trip to Bangkok immediately after the war to meet with Thai officials.55 It is possible that Vinh met with Pridi.56 It is also possible that Mai Văn Quang contacted Pridi. As we know, Quang was the regional secretary of the Vietnamese communist party in Ubon and an associate of Chamlong Daoruang, a former Seri Thai leader and in September 1945 the Minister of Justice in the Thawi cabinet. After the war, Quang was in contact with Thai leaders concerning Vietnam's desire to expand its cooperation with Thailand.57

One of the most pressing matters for the Vietnamese working in Thailand after the war was the acquisition and transport of arms.58 Throughout the 1930s the Thais had received shipments of arms from the Japanese, with a notable increase coming during the brief Franco-Thai border war in 1940-1941. Added to this were weapons parachuted to the Seri Thai by the Allies during WWII. According to one estimate, by the end of the war the Allies had dropped around 175 tons of arms and equipment to the Seri Thai.59 These weapons, the bulk arriving in mid-1945, included Thompson sub-machine guns, grenades, British Sten guns, detonators, booby traps, and ammunition.60 With the war over in August, most of these arms were stockpiled by Seri Thai leaders. A recent study indicates that Thongin Phuriphat and Tieng Serikhan were two officials who took charge of large amounts of these arms, storing them in secret locations in northeast Thailand.61
After the war, weapons and related equipment began filtering into an illicit arms trade in Thailand. Profiting from this arms trade were a host of characters, ranging from gunrunners as far away as Hong Kong and the Philippines to high-level Thai civilian and military leaders (see chapter 6). The contraband trade was boosted further by a breakdown in law-and-order stemming from a combination of social and economic dislocation caused by wartime occupation, the subsequent disarming of over 100,000 Japanese soldiers, the demobilisation of much of the Royal Thai Army (RTA), and the arrival of almost 27,000 Allied troops. To make matters worse, rampant inflation gave rise to conditions ripe for corruption.

For the Vietnamese, the demobilisation of Phibun's military forces made it easier for Pridi and his associates to guide military assistance in their direction. The postwar dislocation also meant that Bangkok found it very difficult to police the remote northeastern region, thereby giving the Viet Minh a freer hand in their resistance activities along the Mekong. A "fascinating place" is how Trần Văn Dinh euphemistically described Thailand during the immediate postwar period. Another former Viet Minh representative, who worked in Thailand following the war, explained that because of the social and political disruptions after the war, "buying arms in Thailand was as easy as buying a beer." More importantly, Dinh said in an interview that in the midst of this turbulent postwar period, the Bangkok government "closed its eyes" to Viet Minh military activities in Thailand, while the provincial northeast government, almost certainly meaning such politicians as Tiang Serikhan, Chamlong Daoruang, and Thongin Phuriphat, openly supported the Viet Minh. As for what remained of the Thai army, Dinh claimed that it "gave full permission" to the Vietnamese to work in Thailand.

As the war came to a close, Viet Minh representatives began crossing the Mekong into Thailand on arms missions in earnest. At the beginning, the overseas Vietnamese in Laos and Thailand provided the money for arms purchases. Later this was supplemented by funds from Hanoi (see chapters 4 and 6). One Vietnamese figure working with Thai
officials after WWII was Vũ Hừu Bình. Bình's fluency in Thai and his work with both the RTA and the Seri Thai during the war made him an important link for the Viet Minh to a broad section of Thai officialdom. On the Seri Thai side, Bình continued his wartime cooperation with the northeastern politicians, Tiang Serikhan and Thongin Phuriphat. Tiang put Bình in touch with arms dealers, Thai officials having access to arms, and provided the Viet Minh with military assistance. Next to Pridi, Tiang and Thongin were probably the Viet Minh's most important connexions at this time. In September, Tiang was an MP representing his home province of Sakhon Nakhon, as well as the Minister of Commerce and Industry in the Thawi Cabinet. Viet Minh officials working with Tiang often referred to him as the "Thai Political Commissaire," the "major person," as one former Viet Minh official put it, with whom they cooperated. Together with Chamlong, Tiang was said to have had contacts with Vietnamese members of ICP branches in Thailand after the war.66

Bình had a non-Seri Thai link in the person of Lieutenant General Phìn Chunhawan, the former Deputy Commander of the Isan (Northeastern) Army. Although Phìn was relieved of his post after the war, he evidently retained considerable influence in military circles and provided assistance to Bình. It seems that Bình's contact with Phìn may have come through his Lao friend, Thao Oun, for it was Oun who introduced Trần Văn Dinh to Phìn.67 In a meeting between Dinh and Phìn in November 1945, Phìn agreed to supply the Viet Minh with a shipment of arms. At the end of 1945, Phìn made good on this promise by delivering ten thousand rifles to the Viet Minh.68 In another meeting with Phìn in Bangkok, Dinh was actually taken to meet the retired General at the military headquarters of the Thai 1st Army in Bangsue. Phìn was fully aware of the fact that Dinh was a Viet Minh military officer and intelligence adviser to Prince Souphanouvong, despite his Lao alias, Thao Somsanith.69 As a "Lao link" between the Thais and Vietnamese, Oun was also the one who introduced Dinh to Tiang Serikhan in November 1945. Meeting Dinh at the Thai-Lao border, Tiang personally escorted him back to Bangkok to meet with Thai officials and discuss arms transfers. It was through Tiang that Dinh met Pridi (who also knew Dinh was a Viet Minh military adviser to Souphanouvong).70

In addition to this, the Thais also provided the Viet Minh with military intelligence on French positions in western Indochina. Arms transfers between the two sides were

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66 Ibid., 31 December 1989 and 20 June 1990, Washington, DC.
67 Ibid. Phìn is the father of former Thai Prime Minister, Chatchai Chunhawan, who was removed by military coup in early 1991.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid., 20 June 1990, Washington, DC. Phìn was also said to be in touch with Mai Văn Quang, through Oun's links with Quang's assistant, Nguyễn Văn Xô. According to Dinh, Quang was one of the most important Vietnamese communists working in Thailand. I have been unable to confirm this.
70 Ibid., 31 December 1989 and 20 June 1990, Washington, DC.
sometimes conducted by codes, known only to the two parties. Vietnamese working in Thailand were even allowed to wear Thai military uniforms, while Thai officials gave the Viet Minh helmets, medical supplies, OSS radio sets, and even supplied the soap used by Viet Minh officials stationed in Laos.71

Perhaps a more telling indication of the favourable conditions available to the Vietnamese immediately after WWII was the Thai decision to allow the Viet Minh to form a military fighting force on Thai soil. On 22 September 1945, Cửu Quốc published an article in which it announced the formation of an overseas Vietnamese "army" in Thailand. According to this report, the Vietnamese in Thailand "had linked together closely" in order to "support the Viet Minh front and the provisional government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam."72 Cửu Quốc explained that during the Japanese resistance Vietnamese nationals had joined the Thais in several guerilla operations. Because of this "fighting cooperation" and the "flexible foreign policy" of a Vietnamese "revolutionary" by the name of Vụ-bụn-Minh [Vũ Hữu Bình?], "the Siamese government has allowed the overseas Vietnamese to organise openly an army" on Thai soil. This force was made up primarily of Vietnamese soldiers who had deserted to Thailand during the 1940-1941 Franco-Thai border war, together with overseas Vietnamese living in Thailand. If we can believe the Cửu Quốc report, this Thai-based Vietnamese force could field over one thousand men.73

The Thai government assisted this unit by returning weapons and money which had been confiscated by Thai authorities when Vietnamese colonial troops defected to Thailand during the Franco-Thai border war (see chapter 2). Cửu Quốc claimed that the soldiers in the overseas army in Thailand were armed well enough to defeat French guerillas near Savannakhet.74 This article concluded by announcing the formation of another detachment, called the All Siam Overseas Vietnamese National Salvation [Association] (Việt Kiều Cửu Quốc Toàn Xiêm).75

Thai government authorities also allowed the DRV to open an information office in Bangkok. Established sometime in August or September 1945, the Vietnam News Service (VNS) was located at 543 Silom Road. According to the American Ambassador in Bangkok in 1947, the Thai government had allocated Crown Property housing, at "extremely low rentals," to DRV's representatives to use for the VNS.76 The main task of the VNS was to disseminate information and publish a bulletin known as Vietnam

71 Ibid, 20 June 1990, Washington, DC.
72 'Quan Doi Viet Kieu Hoat Dong & Xiêm-la' [An Overseas Vietnamese Army Operating in Siam], Cửu Quốc, 22 September 1945, No. 40.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
76 US, DOS, 751.92/1-349, 'Siamese-Franco Relations for the Period July-December 1948,' 3 January 1949, USNA.
News. Directing the VNS was a Viet Minh cadre named Dr. Hai.77 Hai's main task was to provide the international community with information on the DRV and the widening conflict between the French and Vietnamese. In the preface of an article written in English and published by the VNS in September 1945, the information-propaganda role of the VNS is self-evident:

Blood is being shed in South Vietnam. The situation is aggravating every hour, threatening the security of the Far-East... False propaganda and insinuating reports [by the French] have disfigured the world opinion on the Vietnamese question. We wish to expose in the following note, the development of the Vietnamese situation since the establishment of the French domination up to the present day [sic].78

Part II: The French Return to the Rest of Indochina, January to December 1946

II.1. Franco-Vietnamese Negotiations and the Reoccupation of Laos

Although the scope of Vietnamese activities in Thailand had increased significantly by the end of 1945, 1946 was the year during which Thailand's importance to Vietnam took on new meaning as the French moved to retake the rest of Indochina. Having increased their military presence in southern Indochina by late 1945 and early 1946, the French stepped up their diplomatic campaign to gain Chungking's agreement to withdraw its troops from northern Indochina. Chiang Kaishek, competing for control of North China with the Chinese Communists, was increasingly receptive to a deal with the French, knowing it would allow him to divert much needed troops from Indochina to northern China. The French prodded Chungking by offering to abandon their colonial concessions in China. One of the first significant indications of a change came in early February, when the Chinese allowed around two thousand French-led troops to cross into northern Laos on their way towards northwestern Vietnam.79 By 8 February, the gravity of this security threat to Hanoi was clear as French-led troops occupied the

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77 Interview with Trần Văn Đình, 31 December 1990, Washington, D.C. When I interviewed Đình in late 1989, I asked him about a certain Dr. Hai (who we shall meet in chapter 4) about whom I had learned from an interview published in the Thai paper, Suphap Burut, in February 1946. Đình said that this Dr. Hai was the head of the VNS after WWII. As we shall see in chapter 4, a Lê Hy can definitely be documented as the DRV official in charge of the VNS from 1946. In Vietnamese, Hy's name can also be correctly spelled as "Hi," with no change in the Vietnamese pronunciation. However, when read in English, "Hi" may have been pronounced as "Hi," as in the greeting in English. Thus, the "Hai" (as transliterated from the Thai spelling, "lü") said to have worked in Thailand in late 1945 may have been the same person as the "Hy" (Vietnamese spelling) who headed the VNS in 1946.


northwestern town of Lai Châu.80 This was followed by a Sino-French Accord on 28 February. In this agreement, Chungking agreed that its forces would be withdrawn from northern Indochina and replaced by French troops. In exchange, the French renounced their economic concessions and extra-territorial rights in China and granted the Chinese special trading privileges in Vietnam.81

In early 1946, the French adopted a two-track policy that pressed the Chinese diplomatically to withdraw their troops from Indochina and began political action toward the Vietnamese.82 The Sino-French agreement marked the culmination of the first goal. The second came on 6 March, when the French signed an accord with Hồ Chí Minh in which they agreed to hold a referendum on Vietnamese unification and recognised Vietnam's status as a free state (état libre) within the French Union and the Indochinese Federation. The Vietnamese allowed, among other things, the French to station fifteen thousand troops in northern Vietnam. By placating the Vietnamese with the 6 March Accord, French authorities could then turn their attention to retaking Laos and forcing the Thais to return the Indochinese territories.

To the DRV, the signing of the Franco-Sino Accord had important strategic implications.83 With the Chinese agreeing to withdraw, the Vietnamese realised that one of the major obstacles deterring a French attack on northern Indochina would soon be removed. According to Vietnamese communist sources, the ICP was faced with two choices immediately after 28 February: either they could take up arms against the French or they could pursue a peaceful course of action by entering into negotiations with them. One reason for advocating dialogue was that the Vietnamese were militarily unprepared to begin armed struggle in March.84 Secondly, it was felt that if a policy of nation-wide resistance were adopted, it would encounter combined Franco-Sino military opposition.85 Lastly, by gaining a reprieve through negotiations with the French in March, the Viet Minh could concentrate on strengthening their military and political position in Nam Bộ and facilitating the withdrawal of the Chinese. On 5 March, a meeting of the ICP Central

83 Nguyễn Kiên Giang, op. cit., p. 162 and ‘Chi Thí... “Tình Hình và Chủ Trương,”’ VKD, 1945-1950, pp. 43 and 44-45.
Committee approved a policy called "peace in order to advance" (hóa de tiên).\(^8^6\) The next day Hồ Chí Minh signed the 6 March accord.

Despite the benefits derived from the "peace in order to advance" policy for the Vietnamese, the 6 March Accord (as well as the Sino-Franco Accord) effectively weakened Hanoi's "Lao buffer" in the west, to say nothing of possible negative repercussions on Viet Minh-Lao Issara relations.\(^8^7\) Four days after the 6 March Accord, Major General Alessandri launched an offensive on all of Laos above the 16th parallel. With troops, tanks, and planes from Saigon, he quickly retook Savannakhet on the 10th. Although Viet Minh and Lao Issara forces tried to defend the cities they had occupied since the end of WWII, their concentration in urban centres made them easy targets for superior French firepower. On the morning of the 21st, the French began an attack on Thakhek. According to a variety of accounts of this battle, French-flown Spitfires strafed the city in support of a ground attack. Thousands of Lao and Vietnamese inhabitants fled across the Mekong River to Thailand as Lao-Vietnamese forces attempted to hold the city, but to no avail. Hundreds were probably killed in this battle, many of them machine-gunned while trying to flee across the river to Nakhon Phanom.\(^8^8\)

On 24 April, the French retook Vientiane, overthrew the Lao Issara government, and established a pro-French government in its place. With the capture of Luang Prabang by mid-May, the French had completed their reoccupation of Laos. In all, the offensive had sent around fifty thousand refugees (mostly Vietnamese) fleeing into Thailand.\(^8^9\) There

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\(^8^6\) Nguyễn Kiên Giang, op. cit., p. 170. For further details of the March "peace in order to advance" policy, see: Võ Nguyên Giáp, Mả́y Văn Đề́ và Dị́ch Lụ́ Quán Sỹ́ Cụ́a Tá [Several Problems concerning Our Military Policy], (Hanoi: NXBST, 1970), p. 34; Chí Thi của Ban Chấp Hành Trùng Uông Đặng và "Hóa de Tiện" (9 March 1946) [The Party Central Committee's Directives concerning 'Peace in order to Advance'], VKD, 1945-1950, p. 55; and Đảng Bích Ha, op. cit., p. 177.

\(^8^7\) For an indication of Lao dissatisfaction with the Vietnamese signing of the 6 March accord, see: 'Letter 2: Note on the Subject of the Resignation of Prince Souphanouvong by Katay Don Sasorith, Minister of Finance, May 12, 1949,' translated and reproduced by Brown and Zasloff, op. cit., p. 351.

\(^8^8\) The effect of this battle on Vietnamese activities in Thailand will be discussed in the next chapter. Sources for the Battle of Thakhek come from: Sichana Sisan, op. cit., pp. 17-20; 'The Birth,' pp. 433 and 436; Thao Oun Chanamikon, op. cit., pp. 218-20; CVDCQ, pp. 166-67; Suwannarat Chaiyawong, 'Than Prathan Suphanouvong baepyang Patiwa Khaohecao Laramsai' [President Suphanouvong as the Revolutionary in Whom I Believe], in Suphot Dantrakun, op. cit., pp. 196-222; US, DOS, 'Raid on Tha Baw and Situation Vientiane, Nong Khi,' 31 May 1946, USNA; Cứu Quả́c, 6 May 1946, No. 232; and Gunn, op. cit., pp. 169-70. Geoffrey Gunn, who correctly points out the importance of the Battle of Thakhek for Lao history, incorrectly puts the date of the battle on 31 March (p. 169). Gunn seems to overlook the strategic implications for Laos of Franco-Vietnamese negotiations. It was probably no coincidence that Savannakhet was attacked by the French a few days after the 6 March Accord. Unfortunately, inaccuracies detract from Gunn's book, stemming in part from his considerable over-reliance on French intelligence sources at the expense of making more reference to Lao, Thai, US, and/or Vietnamese sources. For a particularly confusing explanation of his use of Sûrêtsé reports, see: Gunn, op. cit., p. 43.

\(^8^9\) Thai, Vietnamese, and American sources put the number of refugees fleeing to Thailand at around 50,000. See the following sources: 'Raid on Tha Bo,' p. 15; Suphap Burnt, 29 April 1946; and Hoang Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 287. Peter Poole, who has done considerable research on the Vietnamese in Thailand, puts the number of Vietnamese refugees fleeing to Thailand in 1945 and 1946 at 46,700. See: Peter A. Poole, 'Notes and Comment, Thailand's Vietnamese Refugees: Can They Be Assimilated?' Pacific Affairs, Volume 40, Nos. 3-4, (Fall-Winter 1967-68), p. 324, fn 2.
were now only two obstacles blocking restoration of French power to all of Indochina: Bangkok and Hanoi.

Having signed the March Accord and retaken Laos, French attention shifted away from the Franco-Vietnamese conflict to the Franco-Thai dispute. In April, Thai representatives travelled to Đàlạt to discuss the future of the Indochinese territories with the French High Commissioner, Admiral Georges Thierry d'Argenlieu. The French demanded return of the Cambodian and Lao territories which Bangkok had gained through the help of the Japanese in 1941. The Thais, however, held out for a readjustment of the border according to historical considerations and proposed that a referendum be held to determine the future status of the disputed territories. The talks broke down at the end of the month. A few days later, the first of two serious incidents broke out along the Thai-Indochina frontier directly related to our discussion of Vietnamese resistance activity in Thailand.

II. 2. The Nakhon Phanom Incident, 5 May 1946

Following the battle of Thakhek, the new French commissioner in Laos had sent letters to the governor of Nong Khai demanding the disarmament and return of Vietnamese refugees who had fled to Thailand. Although the governor had informed refugees of the French desire to see them return, from the evidence available the Thais did not forcibly repatriate any Vietnamese refugees. And with vivid memories of the battle of Thakhek still in mind, few Vietnamese chose to go back, a decision which infuriated the French. At the end of April, the French commissioner warned the Vietnamese that unless they returned to their homes in Laos by 30 April, he would have their property confiscated. Most Vietnamese declined. On 1 May the French burned a number of Vietnamese homes in Thakhek.90

On 5 May, a group of Vietnamese and Lao resistance activists, numbering one hundred to two hundred, attacked the French-held town of Pak Hin Bun, returning to the Thai side, according to a French source, with seventy thousand piastres, firearms, and boats.91 On the 6th, the French Commissioner in Laos sent a letter of protest to the governor of Nakhon Phanom concerning the attack, warning that "the consequences would be grave if redress NOT given."92 At 6:30 pm on the evening of the 7th, the

90 US, DOS, 'Nakhon Phanom Incident, Secret Control, 70,' 13 May 1946, RG 59, Indochina-Politics, Relations: Thai, Box 9, USNA, p. 6 and Appendix I, Items 1A-6B enclosed at the end of this document. The French needed the Vietnamese to fill positions in the Lao colonial bureaucracy.

91 'Nakhon Phanom Incident, Secret Control, 70,' pp. 1-2 (French case), 4-8 (Thai case), and 12; US, DOS, 'Investigation of Border Fighting,' 13 May 1946, RG 59, USNA; US, DOS, 751G:92/5-1346, 'Confidential Telegram to Secretary of State,' 13 May 1946, USNA; 'Statement by Siamese Government on Border Incidents' in US, DOS, 892.014/6-2946, 29 June 1946, USNA; and US, DOS, 892.014/5-1546, 'Report of d'Argenlieu to US Embassy (Paris),' 15 May 1946, USNA. The Thai governor of Nakhon Phanom claimed the group numbered 30 to 40.

92 This quote is taken from Major James Thompson, 'Nakhon Phanom Incident,' p. 2.
French shelled Nakhon Phanom "without warning" for fifteen minutes. On the 8th, a French commander from Laos went to Nakhon Phanom to demand, among other things, "the definitive disarmament of the armed bands of the Viet Minh operating in Siamese territory." The governor asked for eight days to secure an answer from Bangkok. The French gave him until 8:00 pm that evening, warning that he would be responsible for "any reprisals" if he failed to meet the French requests.

Although confrontation seemed imminent, it was averted due to the intervention of US officials. Pridi, who had been elected Prime Minister in March, sent a telegram to d'Argenlieu, asking that Franco-Thai differences be solved by peaceful means. Although d'Argenlieu agreed, he accused the Thai government of direct complicity in the affair, an allegation which Bangkok denied. The French Commissioner in Laos felt the Thai government was "completely ineffectual in curbing and handling the refugees and guerillas," however, he told American investigators that he did not believe Thai officials "had encouraged" the Vietnamese attack on Pak Hin Bun. On 8 May, the US Chargé in Bangkok told the State Department that a French liaison officer in Bangkok had recently told the UK Minister that the French might have to take military action against the Thais before heavy rains began in July. The Chargé took this to mean that the "French military may take advantage of some incident to launch [an] armed attack" on Thailand. The US Consul in Saigon shared this view reporting that d'Argenlieu's allegation of Thai complicity was designed "to compel return" of the disputed territories.

II.3. The Nong Khai Incident, 24 May 1946

On 24 May another serious incident occurred along the Thai-Indochinese border. The site of this incident was Tha Bo, a small Thai town opposite Vientiane with a large Vietnamese community. On the 24th, around two hundred French troops crossed the Mekong and landed in positions north and south of Tha Bo in pursuit of Vietnamese and Lao attackers. During the three hour occupation of Thai territory in and around the town, five Vietnamese and a Thai customs officer were killed, buildings known to house Vietnamese and Lao refugees were mortared, and the town was sprayed with light machine gun fire. While the bulk of the French party returned to Laos thereafter, it left behind a rear guard in Thailand until the morning of the 25th. On the 26th, the French

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93 'Nakhon Phanom Incident,' p. 2 and US, DOS, 892.014/5-1546, 'Paris (Caffery) to Secretary of State,' 15 May 1946, USNA.
94 US, DOS, F.W. 751(G).92/5-1646, 'Aide Memoire on the Nakhon Phanom Incident,' 16 May 1946, USNA and US, DOS, 892.014/5-1546, 'Paris (Caffery) to Secretary of State,' 15 May 1946, USNA.
95 'Nakhon Phanom Incident,' p. 2.
96 US, DOS, 892.014/5-1546, 'Paris (Caffery) to Secretary of State,' 15 May 1946, USNA.
97 'Nakhon Phanom Incident,' p. 3.
98 Ibid., p. 3.
100 US, DOS, 892.014/5-1446, 'Saigon (Reed) to Secretary of State,' 14 May 1946, USNA.
launched similar operations against the Thai towns of Ban Mor and Ban Bassac. French Commander Laure, the official who ordered the raids, told an American investigator that these were "punitive raids in pursuit of rebels and bandits" and his troops had orders to kill any Vietnamese carrying arms. While the governor of Nong Khai did not rule out the possibility that Thais may have unofficially joined in the attack, Bangkok denied any official support and emphasised that it had redoubled its efforts to disarm the refugees in the under-policed and remote northeast.101

In the wake of these incidents, Pridi secretly asked the US Embassy in Bangkok whether "the time had come to resist these incursions by force." In the Thai view, the French had provoked the incidents in a move designed to hasten the return of the Lao and Cambodian territories.102 Although subsequent US intervention brought about better negotiations between Paris and Bangkok and the possibility of UN arbitration, another incident, this time in the French-controlled town of Siemreap in August, derailed Franco-Thai negotiations in Washington. French authorities in Saigon were able to use this incident as grounds for moving at least one thousand Foreign Legion troops to the Thai-Cambodian border, while Radio Saigon broadcasts warned that troops would retake the Lao and Cambodian territories by force. Faced with the real possibility of war with French forces in Indochina, at the beginning of October Bangkok yielded by agreeing to return the territories to the French in exchange for the formation of a Conciliation Commission to consider, at a later date, Thai historical claims to the territories. On 17 November, an accord was signed by the two in Washington and on 9 December France regained yet another piece of her Indochinese colony.103 The DRV was the last remaining obstacle blocking the French return to Indochina.

II.4. The Outbreak of War in Indochina

The events leading up to the outbreak of war in Indochina in December 1946 have been covered in considerable detail in other works.104 For our purposes it is only necessary to outline the break-down in Franco-Vietnamese relations and French military

101 Sources for the Nong Khai incident come from: Stanley Swinton, 'One-Day "Invasion" of Siam,' Straits Times, 21 July 1946; 'Raid on Tha Bo,' pp. 2-14; US, DOS, 892.014/7-346, 'Formal Meeting between Siamese and French at Nankai [Nong Khai],' 15 June 1946, USNA; and US, DOS, 892.014/6-146, 'Compte Rendu des Incidents de Vientiane du 24 Mai 1946' in 'Siamese-Indochinese Border Incident of May 24, 1946,' 1 June 1946, USNA.


103 This discussion of the Siemreap incident and the concurrent breakdown of Franco-Thai talks in Washington is based on a wide-range of US archival documents and Thai secondary sources, far too numerous to cite here. To my knowledge, there is no adequate published study of the 1946 Franco-Thai dispute in Thai, English, and/or French. The author hopes to research this topic further.

actions against the DRV, for these factors would directly inform Hanoi's interest in Thailand. As mentioned above, the Vietnamese had adopted a policy called "peace in order to advance" and reached an accord with the French on 6 March. Although the French were willing to make some concessions to Hanoi in March, in private French officials in Indochina had not abandoned plans to retake northern Vietnam by force.\textsuperscript{105} In late May, Hồ Chí Minh left for France to continue negotiations in Fontainbleau. During these negotiations, Vietnamese diplomats tried to hold Paris to the promises it had made in the 6 March Accord. However, the French position had begun to harden. Paris rejected the Vietnamese demand to set a date for the referendum, knowing that the DRV would win the overwhelming support of the people in such an election. Meanwhile, back in Saigon, d'Argenlieu announced formation of the Cochinchinese Republic, a move which was in direct violation of the March Accord but done with the approval of Paris. In the meantime, the Chinese pulled the majority of their troops out of northern Indochina.

On 10 September 1946, negotiations broke-down in Fontainbleau. Not wanting to leave without some sort of an agreement, Hồ remained and on 14 September he signed a \textit{Modus Vivendi} with the French. Four days later, the last remaining Chinese troops pulled out of Indochina and about two weeks after that the Thais agreed to return the Indochinese territories, thereby allowing Saigon to focus its attention on the DRV. French authorities in Saigon objected to Paris' agreement to the \textit{Modus Vivendi} and a cease-fire, feeling both would undermine their position in the south. As the Norwegian historian Stein Tønnesson has shown, to maintain their hold on Cochinchina, Saigon authorities began a more aggressive policy towards the north after the 14 September \textit{Modus Vivendi}.\textsuperscript{106} Saigon embarked upon a policy which challenged the unity of Vietnam and chipped away at the sovereignty of the DRV by promoting French economic and military interests in northern Vietnam. D'Argenlieu and Valluy stepped up their efforts to fortify the Cochinchinese Republic and simultaneously to eliminate Viet Minh influence in Nam Bō. As for the north, on 15 October the French set up a customs agency in Haiphong without Hanoi's approval, while d'Argenlieu instructed his subordinates to draw up plans for a \textit{coup de force}. On 20 November, a Chinese junk carrying petrol arrived in the Haiphong port in violation of the unilaterally instituted French licence system. The French intercepted the boat. Violence broke out when the Vietnamese intervened to exercise their authority in customs matters. Gun-fire was exchanged and some French intelligence officers were arrested by the Vietnamese. On

\textsuperscript{105} See: Tønnesson, \textit{1946}, pp. 72-75 and 'The Outbreak of War,' pp. 102-05 and 339, fn. 3. In both works, Tønnesson cites French archival documents showing ranking French authorities in Indochina considering a \textit{coup de force} against northern Vietnam in April 1946.

\textsuperscript{106} 'The Outbreak of War,' pp. 101 and 264-66.
the 23rd, after the French had delivered an unacceptable ultimatum to the Vietnamese, the French forcibly took control of the city at the cost of thousands of Vietnamese lives.107

In the wake of this incident and others,108 the Vietnamese prepared themselves militarily and psychologically for war, although Hồ refused to close the door to a diplomatic solution. However, by mid-December French officials in Indochina were worried that unless they acted quickly to create a rupture with Hanoi which would allow them to move against the DRV, political changes in Paris might destroy their plans to retake northern Vietnam and undermine their interests in Cochinchina completely. Tension mounted in Hanoi as armed skirmishes proliferated and the Vietnamese and French anticipated the other to make an imminent attack. On the evening of the 19th, war broke out between the Vietnamese and French.109 That night the general resistance against the French was announced.

108 Almost immediately after the Haiphong incident, another very similar incident occurred in Lang Son. See Tørnsøn, 1946, pp. 106-20.
109 For a brilliant discussion of the complex events leading up to the outbreak of full-scale war in Indochina in 1946, see: Tønnesson, 1946.
Chapter 4

Thailand and the Vietnamese Resistance in 1946

At this point, we shall return to January 1946 to trace the expansion of Vietnamese resistance activities in Thailand in relation to the political and military actions taken by the French in 1946. As we have seen in chapter 3, during the latter part of 1945 the presence of the Chinese in northern Indochina had deterred the French from retaking northern Vietnam and most of Laos. However, in early 1946 the strategic climate in Indochina began to change again. As the new year began, the security of the Hanoi-based DRV government and that of resistance forces located below the 16th parallel was coming under increased pressure as the French expanded their military control over large parts of southern Trung Bố and much of Nam Bố. To the southwest and east, Vietnamese strategists faced pincer threats following the French reoccupation of Cambodia and southern Laos and as the French navy increased its presence along the Vietnamese coast and in the Gulf of Tonkin.1 To the northwest, the decision by Chungking to allow around two thousand French troops to cross into northern Laos and northwestern Bạc Bố in early February rekindled fears of a French attack from that direction. And with the Chinese now moving towards an agreement with the French to pull their troops out of northern Indochina, it must have been clear to Vietnamese resistance leaders at the outset of 1946 that Vietnam was becoming increasingly encircled.

Part I: West into Thailand

I.1. Thailand and the Resistance in Nam Bố

To Viet Minh leaders in Nam Bố, the expansion of the French military presence in southern Vietnam and Cambodia raised the strategic value of Thailand in relation to the southern resistance. To take advantage of sympathy Thai leaders had shown for the Vietnamese anticolonial struggle thus far, in early 1946 several ranking members of the People's Committee for Nam Bố travelled to Thailand to strengthen military and political

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1 As noted earlier, the French airbase in Pakšé was tactically important to any plans to move against Hanoi. The Gulf of Tonkin had been mined by the Allies and the Japanese in places during WWII. As the US swept these mines following the war, the French were able to increase steadily their naval presence along the coast and in the Gulf.
activities there. One of the first representatives sent to Bangkok by the Viet Minh was the former chairman of the People's Committee established in September 1945, Trần Văn Giậu. Arriving in early 1946 (before the 28 February Franco-Sino accord was signed), Giậu said in an interview in 1989 that his main tasks were to contact Pridi Phanomyong; to tend to the acquisition and shipment of arms and equipment back to southern Vietnam; to strengthen the Cambodian resistance movement; and to expand links to and to integrate the overseas Vietnamese in Thailand and western Indochina into Viet Minh operations.

Pridi Phanomyong, still the dominant figure in Thai politics in 1946, was one Giậu's most important contacts in Thailand. Both French speakers, Pridi and Giậu had been politically active in France during the 1920s, reportedly having become friends there in the late 1920s. Upon arriving in Bangkok, Giậu quickly contacted Pridi, who made the necessary arrangements for Giậu's stay in Thailand and provided him with a large house in Bangkok. If we are to believe Giậu, his friendship with Pridi was such that he could call upon the Thai leader "at any time he wanted." Meetings between these two were usually held at Pridi's home in Bangkok, where discussions covered a wide range of topics, but focused mainly on Thai military assistance to and cooperation with the Viet Minh. As Giậu put it, the Vietnamese received the "strong support" of Pridi. Two of Pridi's former Seri Thai associates, Tiang Serikhan and Thongin Phuriphat, were singled out by Giậu as Thai officials with whom he often worked closely during his tenure in Thailand.

Giậu was not the only Viet Minh representative from Nam Bồ to work in Thailand in early 1946. Joining him was Phạm Văn Bách, the one who had replaced Giậu as the chairman of the People's Committee of the South in September 1945. In early 1946, Bách arrived in Bangkok, leaving his wife, and at least some of his children, there for most of the late 1940s. Although the details surrounding his work in Thailand are few, as a ranking member of the southern resistance his activities in Thailand were surely related to matters of obtaining and shipping arms and equipment back to Nam Bồ, as well

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2 This is according to an interview with Trần Văn Đình, 20 June 1990, Washington, DC.
3 Interview with Trần Văn Giậu, 3 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City. Hoàng Nhật Tân said in an interview that the idea of contacting Pridi came from Trần Văn Giậu and not from Hồ Chí Minh. Interview with Hoàng Nhật Tân, 5 May 1989, Hanoi. I have been unable to confirm this. A French report said that Trần Văn Giậu was one of the first to have organised an arms traffic route between Thailand and Vietnam in November 1945. 'L'Approvisionnement en armes et munitions des forces vietamiennes,' 15 Janvier 1947.
4 Interview with Trần Văn Đình, 20 June 1990, Washington, DC.
5 Ibid and Interview with Trần Văn Giậu, 3 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City.
6 Interview with Trần Văn Giậu, 3 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City.
7 Ibid. and extracts of an interview with Trần Văn Giậu by Thomas Engelbert, 8 August 1989, Ho Chi Minh City. I am grateful to Engelbert for providing me with a transcript of his interview with Giậu. Tiang was the Minister of the Interior in the Khuang Aphaiwong cabinet (January to February 1946) and Deputy Minister of the Interior in the Pridi cabinet (March to August 1946). In mid-1946, Phuriphat became Minister of Industry in the Thamrong cabinet.
as recruiting Vietnamese in Thailand for service in the resistance against the French in Vietnam.\(^8\)

Two other senior officials known to have been in Thailand in 1946 were Nguyễn Văn Tảo and Nguyễn Thanh Sơn (also known as Nguyễn Văn Tây). Tảo was an influential ICP member who had long been active in the south. He had fled to France in 1926 and joined the Central Committee of the French Communist Party a year later. In August 1945, he joined the People's Committee of the South. He arrived in Bangkok in early 1946 and probably attended to tasks similar to Bách's. However, shortly thereafter he left Thailand for Hanoi, where he became the Minister of Labour in the DRV government in 1947.\(^9\) Nguyễn Thanh Sơn was a regional member of the Communist Party Committee in the South (Xứ ủy viễn Đảng bộ Nam kỳ) and a member of the Southern Resistance Committee and Administration. After WWII, he had worked with Cambodian resistance leaders who had fled to Nam Bồ after the French reoccupation of Cambodia in October 1945. In early 1946, he was still working with Cambodian resistance groups, but now he was doing so from bases in Thailand. In addition to this task, during his tenure in Thailand Sơn also attended to the acquisition and shipment of arms back to Nam Bồ. He was said to have operated from two main bases, both being the starting points for arms routes leading back to Nam Bồ. One was an overland trail based out of the Thai frontier town of Aranyaprathet. The other was a sea route leaving from the Thai port city of Khanchanaburi.\(^10\) Sơn and other Vietnamese representatives were in contact with Thai officials concerning their arms dealings and other matters.\(^11\)

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\(^8\) Evidence of Bách's presence in Thailand comes from two sources: Interview with Trần Văn Dính, 20 June 1990, Washington, DC and 'The Broadcast Statement of the Wife of Mr. Phạm Văn Bách, President of the Viet-Minh Administrative Committee in South Viet-Nam,' Vietnamese Information Bureau, 31 May 1951, CRS A1838/2; 466/1, Part 3, AA. Madame Bách lived in Thailand during the latter half of the 1940s. In 1951, she joined the Bảo Đại government in Saigon, condemning the extortion, duplicity, and crimes of the Vietnamese communists working in Thailand.

\(^9\) Interview with Trần Văn Dính, 20 June 1990, Washington, DC. Besides Tảo and Giau, other southern Vietnamese anticolonialists active in France during the 1920s included: Đặng Bách Mai (Minister of Finance after the August Revolution), Phan Văn Hüm, Trần Văn Thach (leader of the Trotskyist front in Cochinchina during the 1930s), and Hồ Hủa Tứng (political activist of leftist tendencies). It will be remembered that Pridi was also living in France at the time. According to Pridi's Thai colleagues, who studied with him in France in the 1920s, Pridi often met with Chinese and "especially Vietnamese nationalists" living in Paris during this time. It is not impossible that Pridi had met with some of these individuals during his time in France. See: Suphot Dantrakun, Cak Rathaburut Awsuo Pridi Phanomyong thang Rathaburat Prem Tinsulanon [From Elder Statesman Pridi Phanomyong to Statesman Prem Tinsulanand] (Thonburi: Sammakphim Santitham, ndc.), p. 47 and Duen Bunnak, Than Pridi Rathaburat Awsuo kap Phaen Setthakit Thai khon Raek [Elder Statesman Pridi Phanomyong: The First Thai to Put Forth an Economic Plan], (Bangkok: Photoamonkhamph, 2517 [1974]), p. 38.

\(^10\) Nguyễn Hao Hùng, 'Liên Minh Chính Dậu Việt Nam-Campuchia Mệt Nạn Tơ Bảo Đám Thắng Lợi của Cách Mạng Campuchia trong Thời Kỳ Chống Pháp, 1945-1954' [The Vietnamese-Cambodian Fighting Alliance as One Factor Securing the Success of the Cambodian Revolution during the Period of Resistance Against the French, 1945-1954], Hội nghị Khoa Học về Quan hệ Việt Nam-Campuchia trong Lịch sử [A Conference by the Social Sciences on Vietnamese-Cambodian Relations in Historical Perspective], (Hồ Chí Minh City: UBKHXHN, 1980), pp. 145-46; and Interview with Trần Văn Dính, 20 June 1990, Washington, DC. Other, though less known Vietnamese representatives reported to have been working in Thailand in 1946, included: Lý Bách Sơn, Trần Thanh Trái, Trần Mãi, Lý Hòa Vinh, and Lê Bien. See: 'The Broadcast Statement of the Wife of Mr. Phạm Văn Bách,' p. 2.

1.2. Viet Minh Leaders in Laos Cross into Thailand

Meanwhile, Viet Minh officials in Laos were also beginning to pay more attention to the strategic importance of Thailand. As the French and Chinese moved closer to an agreement in February, Viet Minh strategists working in Laos above the 16th parallel realised that Vietnam's "Lao buffer" could no longer be guaranteed. It was clear that a Franco-Sino agreement would open the way to French military action against central and upper Laos. Thus, as the French intensified their diplomatic negotiations with Chungking, the Viet Minh countered by trying to postpone the Chinese withdrawal. As Dinh said of Viet Minh policy toward the Chinese in Laos: "We wanted their departure postponed, and used them to delay the return of the French and allow us more time to consolidate." Dinh does not say how they planned to do this.

Sometime in early 1946, before the conclusion of the 28 February Franco-Sino accord, the Party branches of the ICP in Thailand and Laos held a meeting in Thakhek to discuss the changing strategic environment, with particular reference to the possibility of a French offensive on Laos following what appeared to be an imminent Franco-Sino accord. Dinh, who was a Viet Minh military officer working in Thailand but not a communist party member or a participant in this meeting, said that ICP members Mai Văn Quang, Trần Đức Vinh, and Vũ Hữu Bình attended this conference. Besides these participants, Dinh said that Thai officials were also in attendance. In what appears to be a reference to the same meeting, a Lao source reports that in mid-February (before the Franco-Sino accord) a special meeting of the Lao ICP branch was held during which participants were agreed that the French were preparing to attack Thakhek and, in response, appropriate defensive preparations had to be taken. After the Franco-Sino accord was signed, a resolution was passed by the Lao ICP branch calling for the arming of Thakhek against the French. These results were reported to Souphanouvong, who was said to have agreed to them. If this is true, then it would give credence to Dinh's version which says that changes were made during the Thakhek meeting to reorganise the military preparedness of the Viet Minh in Laos and to delay the departure of the Chinese. According to Dinh, Thai participants at this meeting, possibly northeastern politicians such as Tiang or Thongin, told their Vietnamese counterparts that in the event of a premature Chinese withdrawal from Laos, the Thai military would intervene to delay the return of the French. It is unknown what action the Thais had in mind. However,
judging from Thailand's weak military position after the war and its delicate relationship with the major powers, it seems most unlikely that the Thais could have provided such overt assistance as military intervention.16

As we know, shortly after the Thakhek meeting and the conclusion of the Franco-Sino accord, the ICP adopted a policy of "peace in order to advance." On 6 March, Hồ Chí Minh signed the March Accord, and within a few days Alessandri began his advance into all of Laos north of the 16th parallel.

The Vietnamese had anticipated such an attack on Laos and had met with Thai representatives to make contingency plans.17 Vietnamese cadres asked their Thai counterparts to allow Vietnamese inhabitants in Laos to be evacuated to northeast Thailand in the event of a French attack on Laos. Lê Mạnh Trinh, who may have been involved in these negotiations, said that the Thai government "agreed with this suggestion."18 This was prescient, for, as we have seen, on the morning of 21 March the French launched their offensive on Thakhek. By the end of March, much of the overseas Vietnamese population in Lao towns and the Lao Issara government crossed into Thailand as the French took control of Laos.19

Makeshift huts went up along the Thai side of the Mekong River around Nong Khai and Nakhon Phanom, as 50,000 mainly Vietnamese refugees poured into Thailand. Cut-off from Hanoi, these refugees were completely dependent on the goodwill of the Thais. Following the French attack the new Prime Minister, Pridi Phanomyong, chose not to bow to French demands for the repatriation of the refugees back to Laos. Instead, the Pridi government instructed provincial authorities to set up more shelters along the Mekong and to find jobs for Vietnamese forced into Thailand. Viet Minh adherents were given permission to appoint their own representatives in areas with large Vietnamese emigré communities; to form employment headquarters; to assemble openly; and to listen to news reports.20

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16 Interview with Trần Văn Dinh, 31 December 1989, Washington, DC. In late 1945, Mai Văn Quang had reportedly met with Thai leaders to discuss this matter. Prince Phetsarath has written that Seri Thai officials, some of whom he says were northeast politicians, helped the Lao Issara capture Vientiane after WWII. Phetsarath says that as the French prepared to retake Vientiane "the Thai said they would help by luring the French into a trap." See: John Murdoch, op. cit., p. 46.

17 CVDCQ, p. 64 and Sichana, op. cit., p. 17. It is possible that the Vietnamese met with their longtime supporter, Tiang Serikhan, who was Minister of the Interior in the February 1946 Aphaiwong cabinet. One of the responsibilities of the Ministry of the Interior was overseeing border and immigration matters.

18 CVDCQ, p. 64. According to Sichana, this decision was made by the ICP branch. Sichana, op. cit., p. 17.

19 CVDCQ, pp. 64-65 and 'The Birth,' p. 436. See also: Đình Bích Hà, op. cit., pp. 178-79. A continuing problem for the Viet Minh was the concentration of Vietnamese-Lao military forces in Lao urban centres. As one ICP leader working in Laos and Thailand during this time bluntly described this weakness: "[W]e did not have regional bases, rear bases, and most importantly, we did not have the participation of the [Lao and minority] peasants to act as our rearguard." CVDCQ, p. 63.

20 CVDCQ, p. 67 and US, DOS, 'Secret Investigation of Border Fighting, Office of Strategic Service,' 20 May 1946, RG 59, Indochina Politics, Folder: Relations with Thai, Box 9, USNA; US, DOS, 'Secret Report on the Nakhon Phanom Incident,' 13 May 1946, RG 59, Indochina-Politics, Folder: Relations
The acting Minister of the Interior, Tieng Serikhan, travelled to northeast Thailand to meet with provincial authorities concerning the means by which the government would assist the Vietnamese refugees. According to Trinh, Tieng informed border authorities that the Vietnamese refugees were entitled "to freedom of movement, residence, and the right to making a living." 21 A Thai study of the Vietnamese in Thailand confirms that the Ministry of the Interior allowed these refugees to enter Thailand without having to go through official immigration channels. In addition, the Ministry of Communications and Transportation exempted the refugees from entry fees in exchange for their labour on highways in the northeast. 22 The Thai government also permitted the Vietnamese to work as lumbermen in forests around Nong Khai and Ubon, while others found employment as carpenters and mechanics or took up jobs in business and trade. 23

Another important contribution of the Pridi government was the allocation of a number of plots of land to Vietnamese refugees. These plots, the largest reportedly located outside of Ubon, were for the Vietnamese refugees to farm. Beginning around April 1946, Hoàng Văn Hoan says in his memoir, the Overseas Vietnamese General Association took advantage of this Thai-allocated (presumably leased) land to establish what he calls overseas Vietnamese Collective Farms. Each family was assigned a certain amount of land within the collective for which they were responsible. 24

Besides government assistance to the Vietnamese, local Thais along the Mekong River donated food, supplies, and clothing to the refugees. 25 Buddhist priests temporarily housed Vietnamese in their temples and pagodas. Other Thais opened their doors to the Vietnamese by providing short term housing and land upon which to subsist. 26 Thais and Vietnamese in the area even combined their efforts to form special medical centres to administer to the health needs of the large refugee population. 27 The government supplemented these efforts by providing inoculations against epidemics, with the Provincial Director of Public Health for Nakhon Phanom administering directly to the health needs of the refugees at the border. 28 According to two Viet Minh leaders working in the area at the time, Thai assistance during this period greatly ameliorated the plight of the refugees within a short period of time and contributed to the restrengthening of

21 CVDCQ, p. 67.
24 Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 285 and Bangkok Post, 8 August 1946.
26 Interview with Hoàng Nhật Tân, 5 May 1989, Hanoi and CVDCQ, p. 67.
27 Son Tung, op. cit., p. 168.
28 US, DOS, 'Nakhon Phanom Incident, Secret Control 70,' 13 May 1946, RG 59, Indochina-Politics, Box 9, USNA.
Vietnamese resistance work in Thailand. Also helping was the fact that the Thais made little effort to disarm the Viet Minh operating in Thailand. A US Embassy official, who was sympathetic to the Indochinese independence movements and had close contacts with resistance representatives in Bangkok, wrote in a secret report that the Thai government had not "made any real attempt to disarm the majority of the [Vietnamese/Lao] refugees."

With a larger number of Vietnamese now concentrated on the Thai side of the Mekong, the ICP's Overseas Vietnamese Special Committee and the Overseas Vietnamese National Salvation Association increased their work among the Vietnamese refugee population in Thailand. Firstly, daily sessions were scheduled to allow organised groups of Vietnamese to listen to Radio Vietnam, after which short discussions were held to explain the situation in Vietnam and in the world in general in relation to the Vietnamese independence movement. Secondly, an overseas Vietnamese weekly newspaper, Độc Lập (Independence), was published and disseminated among the Vietnamese communities in Thailand (see picture next page). Letters from Hồ Chí Minh, the government, and soldiers fighting in Vietnam were conveyed to the Vietnamese in Thailand. Books, such as President Ho Chi Minh in the Memory of the Overseas Vietnamese, were used to increase the awareness of the Vietnamese of the national movement for independence. Even special educational classes were organised, including a session on Dang Thuc Híra. To finance their activities and contribute toward the war effort, the Viet Minh administered taxes on Vietnamese communities in Thailand, while many Vietnamese families in the northeast sent clothes and medicines back to Vietnam.

Despite assistance from the Thai government during this period, Vietnamese leaders in the area were nonetheless still careful to maintain Thai favour. Of considerable importance was the need to prevent racial incidents from interfering with Vietnamese resistance activities in Thailand. Because of the sudden influx in the number of Vietnamese coming into Thailand, ethnic distrust surfaced among local inhabitants in northeast Thailand who were worried about possible negative repercussions on them. On several occasions, local villagers voiced resentment about the fact that the Vietnamese often came to control trading and commerce in various northeastern cities. An American military observer recorded in his investigation of the Nong Khai incident in late May that the governor of Nong Khai privately feared that the Vietnamese refugees who were arriving in northeast Thailand "might eventually control all the business in the area as they were much more shrewd than the Siamese." Despite the close cooperation between Vietnamese and Thai

30 James Thompson, 'Nakhon Phanom Incident, Secret Control, 70,' p. 11.
31 Wichan, op. cit, pp. 45 and 69-70 and CVDCQ, pp. 67-68. Wichan writes that the Viet Minh secretly set up their main headquarters in Udon Thani under communist direction. Wichan, op. cit, p. 62.
32 'Raid on Tha Baw,' p. 14. The Governor felt the Vietnamese were "clanish" and probably would not be able to "be absorbed into the native population." The Thai government was deeply worried by the
possibility that the Vietnamese would eventually take Thai jobs and have undue influence in the economy. Bangkok formed a special committee to guard against this problem. See: Wichan, op. cit., pp. 43-44.
officials, at a local level Viet Minh leaders had to emphasise to their nationals repeatedly the importance of respecting Thai laws and ethnic sensitivities and preserving a spirit of cooperation in order to avoid the negative effects ethnic tension would have on Vietnamese resistance activities in Thailand.33

An interesting interview of a Viet Minh official by Thai journalist, Kulap Saipradit, demonstrates this point aptly. A few weeks before the French returned to Laos, Kulap travelled to Battambang to interview Dr. Hai, the editor of the Vietnam News Service who was working in the area. Speaking in halting Thai, Hai described to Kulap the sacrifices of the Vietnamese and explained the righteousness of the Vietnamese independence movement.34 Intrigued by the discussion, Kulap asked Hai to describe to his readers the significance of Vietnam's new flag. Kulap recorded Hai's description in a frontpage article in Suphap Burnt as follows:

Dr. Hai brought the new Vietnamese flag out to show me its characteristics. The background is red with a five-sided yellow star in the centre. Dr. Hai explained to me that the red background symbolised the blood of the people and the yellow star signified the people of the yellow race. The five sides of the star symbolised the five types of people who constituted the Vietnamese nation: Soldiers [thahan], students [naksurksa], merchants [phokha], farmers [chawna], and workers [kammakon].35

However, in spite of Kulap's favourable portrayal of the Vietnamese independence movement, Thai goodwill still could not be taken for granted by the Vietnamese. In a clear reassurance to Thai sceptics, Hai told Kulap that although the Viet Minh had made some "mistakes" in Thailand in the past, Bangkok should rest assured that the Vietnamese independence struggle would not culminate in an "invasion of anyone."36

For the time being, though, cooperation seems to have prevailed. Following the French reoccupation of Laos, representatives of the Thai and Lao Overseas Vietnamese Salvation Associations were "in close touch" with ranking leaders in the Thai government—specifically, Tieng Serikhun, Thongin Phuriphat, Thawi Udon, Chamlong

33 CVDCQ, p. 68. In his discussion of the Vietnamese in Thailand, Thadeus Flood makes the following statement: "In the case of the Vietnamese (as with the largest minority group, the Chinese) there is virtually no evidence of spontaneous, local, popular animosity on the part of the Thai. Indeed, in the relations between the two groups, there is much evidence that local Thai villagers often shielded Vietnamese from French and Thai police during the twentieth century." While Flood was one of the very first to point out the important periods of cooperation between these two groups, it is too much of an over-simplification to say that "there is virtually no evidence of spontaneous, local, popular animosity on the part of local Thai" toward the Vietnamese. There were racial incidents, especially local resentment of Vietnamese control of trading in northeast Thailand. See: Flood, op. cit., p. 33.


35 'Sadaeng Khwammanmai,' p. 2.

36 Ibid., p. 2.
Daoruang, and Thong Kantatham. In a letter to the overseas Vietnamese in Thailand on 9 April, a Vietnamese newspaper reported that because the "lines of communication are unfavourable" between northeast Thailand and Vietnam, the refugees would have to remain in Thailand for a period of time. However, the government reassured refugees that it was "looking for a way to ease the difficulties." In its concluding paragraph, this letter praised the "Thai government and people" for the assistance they had provided to the Vietnamese refugees "during this difficult period."

I.3. Viet Minh Military Activities in Thailand

Militarily, the Vietnamese were faced with several problems following the French reoccupation of Laos. Foremost, the Viet Minh's Lao operations had now been pushed into northeastern Thailand, cut-off from Hanoi by the French presence in Laos. Soldiers who heretofore had been stationed in Lao towns on the eastern side of the Mekong were now on the western side. Even the ICP's Lao Regional Committee had to be withdrawn to Thailand. Compounding the situation was the fact that the Thais were wary of letting the Viet Minh transfer their Lao military operations command to Thailand. It will be remembered that the Viet Minh had created the Lao-Vietnamese Allied General Staff in October 1945. Trần Văn Dinh said in an interview that he was involved in negotiations with Thai officials following the French reoccupation of Laos aimed at finding an acceptable way to permit Viet Minh military operations to continue in Thailand. To allay Thai fears of too overt a Vietnamese military presence on their soil, Dinh suggested that the Viet Minh's Lao operations command be incorporated into Souphanouvong's intelligence service to make it less visible and more acceptable to the Thais. Dinh said the Thais agreed to this and the Lao intelligence service absorbed much of what had been the Viet Minh's Lao military command.

In addition, it was in Thailand that the Viet Minh leaders who had been in Laos changed their military tactics. On 29 April 1946, Dinh was instructed by the Central Vietnamese Resistance Committee to leave Thai towns and take up guerilla tactics in the countryside, in areas along the Thai-Lao border. By November 1946, Dinh says an undercover intelligence network was in place. This was supplemented by continued assistance from the Thais whose scouts and spies provided the Viet Minh military with valuable intelligence on French positions in western Indochina.

37 The Birth,' p. 429, fn. 8.
38 Thu Gửi các Việt Kíu ở Thái-lan' [A Letter to the Overseas Vietnamese in Thailand], Dân Quốc [The Nation], 9 April 1946, p. 2.
39 Dặng Bích Hà, op. cit., p. 178.
40 The Birth,' p. 433.
41 Interview with Trần Văn Dinh, 31 December 1989 and 20 June 1990, Washington, DC.
42 Ibid. I am grateful to Trần Văn Dinh for allowing me to see a copy of the 29 April order.
Meanwhile, other Vietnamese resistance leaders along the Thai-Cambodian border were organising mobile combat units to supply arms and young men to the anti-French resistance in Nam Bô. The first military team formed out of Thailand was said to have been a well-armed battalion called Trần Phú (named after a young Vietnamese who had helped form the ICP). Giàu says that this battalion numbered around five hundred to six hundred troops. It was recruited from among Vietnamese émigrés in Thailand and western Indochina and was initially stationed in the Thai-administered Battambang province. According to Nguyễn Đức Quý, the Trần Phú unit was outfitted from among Vietnamese communities in remote parts of eastern Ubon Ratchathani province.\(^{43}\) The Trần Phú operation sent young overseas Vietnamese men to Nam Bô to join the resistance against the French. Another mobile fighting unit that was set up by Viet Minh officials in Thailand was called Quang Trung, named after the late 18th century Tây Sơn leader. This group was based out of the area north of the Tonle Sap in Cambodia. It moved between that point and northeastern Nam Bô, with the dual tasks of transporting weapons back to southern Vietnam and engaging the French in guerilla fighting.\(^{44}\)

In addition to these troops, in 1946 DRV representatives working from Thailand presided over the formation of two multi-unit combat groups designed to transport weapons and equipment back to Nam Bô and to fight the French. These teams were referred to as the Mekong I and Mekong II (Cửu Long I and Cửu Long II).\(^{45}\) Mekong I was said to be a sea operation which went around the coast of Cambodia to southern Nam Bô. Its main task was to transport weapons acquired in and through Thailand to the southern resistance. Mekong II was an overland route which originated in the area south of the Tonle Sap and travelled from Pursat and Battambang to Kompong Thom and then into Nam Bô. It reportedly numbered around three hundred persons and transported weapons and equipment back to Vietnam and engaged the French.\(^{46}\) According to Giàu, it was later "almost completely decimated by the French."\(^{47}\) Another combat unit was known as That Sơn, named after the seven mountain border region, but the details of its operations remain unknown.\(^{48}\)

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\(^{43}\) Interview with Nguyễn Đức Quý, 5 April 1989, Hồ Chí Minh City. Quỳnh Anh says that the small town of Phimun in Ubon had a large Vietnamese population which had sent many youths back to Vietnam to fight the French. Quý may be referring to this town. Another village in Ubon Ratchathani which served Vietnamese resistance efforts was Phăng Khơn. Sơn Tùng, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 169.

\(^{44}\) Evidence concerning these combat groups comes from the following sources: Interviews: Trần Văn Giàu, 3 April 1989, Hồ Chí Minh City and Nguyễn Đức Quý, 5 April 1989, Hồ Chí Minh City and published sources: Hoàng Văn Hoàn, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 286-87; and Nguyễn Hao Hưng, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 145-46. Hoan says that the Trần Phú unit was company size.

\(^{45}\) Interview with Trần Văn Giàu, 3 April 1989, Hồ Chí Minh City; Hoàng Văn Hoàn, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 287; and Nguyễn Hao Hưng, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 145-46.

\(^{46}\) Interviews: Trần Văn Giàu, 3 April 1989, Hồ Chí Minh City and Nguyễn Đức Quý, 5 April 1989, Hồ Chí Minh City.

\(^{47}\) Interview with Trần Văn Giàu, 3 April 1989, Hồ Chí Minh City.

\(^{48}\) Interview with Nguyễn Đức Quý, 5 April 1989, Hồ Chí Minh City.
Giau said in an interview that two more combat units, Mekong III and IV, were also created under Viet Minh supervision. Mekong III, left from Battambang, crossed Siemreap, Kompong Thom, and Kongpong Cham and ended in Tây Ninh province in southern Vietnam.\(^49\) It is unclear which course Mekong IV took, although its tasks were probably similar to the others (see Map IV). Considering the military importance of these units to the Nam Bô resistance, it seems certain that Viet Minh officials present in Thailand in 1946, such as Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, Phạm Văn Bách, and Nguyễn Văn Tào, joined Giau in organising and directing these military groups and their operations. Pridi facilitated their work by allowing them to work from Thai soil and through continued military assistance. In one case in 1946, he made available 20 tonnes of carbines to the Viet Minh.\(^50\)

I.4. Strengthening the Cambodian Resistance out of Thailand

Besides fighting the French and delivering arms to Vietnam, these Viet Minh mobile combat units also worked with Cambodian resistance groups operating in eastern Thailand and western Cambodia.\(^51\) As we saw in chapters 1 and 2, up to the end of the Pacific War, Vietnamese cadres in Thailand had paid little, if any, attention to building bases among overseas Vietnamese communities in western Cambodia, let alone working with the Cambodians. Indeed, it was the Thais who had presided over the formation of the first Khmer Issarak group in late 1940. By early 1941, a considerable number of Cambodians had joined in this Thai-dominate partnership to oust the French. Five years later, with open hostilities with the French underway in southern Vietnam, the Vietnamese now hoped to begin a similar relationship with the Cambodians. Yet because the orientation of the Cambodian resistance had been toward the west since 1940 and because Vietnamese resistance organisations in northeast Thailand prior to 1945 had been orientated toward northern Vietnam, Vietnamese resistance organisations in Thailand had no real links with Cambodians or overseas Vietnamese enclaves in western Cambodia such as they had in Laos. As a result, at the end of WWII, the Vietnamese found themselves considerably isolated from Cambodian resistance groups operating in eastern Thailand and western Cambodia.

At the outbreak of war in southern Vietnam in September 1945, the Regional Committee of the ICP in Nam Bô dispatched a representative to Cambodia with orders to increase the Viet Minh's cooperation with the Cambodian resistance.\(^52\) However, within

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\(^{49}\) Interview with Trần Văn Giau, 3 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City.


weeks the French reoccupation of Cambodia sent Cambodian revolutionaries fleeing in two directions: one group went to southern Vietnam, while the other sought refuge in Thailand.\footnote{Livre Noir, p. 18 and Thanh Đam, op. cit., p. 75.} According to several Vietnamese experts on Cambodia writing with the events of the late 1970s in mind, some of those Cambodians who went to Nam Bô were helped by the Viet Minh's Southern Resistance Administrative Committee and the southern ICP branch in the creation of the Cambodian Independence Committee (CIC). This Nam Bô-based committee was said to have had 100 Cambodian members who received military, political, and financial aid from the Southern Committee, as well as the support of the large Khmer population residing in southern Vietnam.\footnote{Nguyễn Hao Hưng, op. cit., p. 144 [citing correspondence with Nguyễn Thanh Sơn]; Ben Kieman, 'Origins of Khmer Communism' in \textit{Southeast Asian Affairs} (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1981), p. 164; and Thanh Đam, op. cit., p. 75. Pachoeun was said to be the president of the CIC and Kim Chuong the vice-president. Without mentioning the CIC by name, the \textit{Livre Noir} says that the Vietnamese in Nam Bô created a resistance organisation during this time. \textit{Livre Noir}, p. 18.} This coincided with an ICP directive calling for the "immediate establishment of a joint Vietnamese-Cambodian military commission" which would bring about "a guerilla war on Cambodian soil."\footnote{Chi Thi . . . 'Khằng Chiến, Kien Quoc," 25 November 1945,' VKD, 1945-1950, p. 37.} It appears this never materialised and at the end of 1945 the CIC fell apart.\footnote{Thanh Đam, op. cit., p. 75 and Kieman, 'Khmer Communism,' p. 164.}

Without access to Cambodian sources, it is impossible to explain definitively why the CIC disintegrated. Although French advances in southern Vietnam in late 1945 certainly put the CIC under great pressure, as the Vietnamese claim, there was also internal friction between Vietnamese and Cambodian cadres of which we know very little. As early as October 1945, the ICP's mouthpiece, \textit{Cô Gái Phông} [Liberation Flag], published an article in which it reported that the Cambodian government led by Son Ngoc Thach wished to see Nam Bô (Kampuchea Krom in Khmer) returned and the ICP also noted the deaths of overseas Vietnamese in Cambodia at the hands of Cambodians. \textit{Cô Gái Phông} criticised these developments, saying that "the Cambodian people always forget that it was the French bandits who had given away one-third of Cambodia to Siam . . ."\footnote{Dân Cao-miên Dâ Lên Tiêng [The Cambodians Speak Up], \textit{Cô Gái Phông}, No. 328, 28 October 1945. In 1980, Nguyễn Thanh Sơn told Ben Kieman that in early September 1945 the Viet Minh had contacted Son Ngoc Thach concerning the need for increased cooperation against the French. Son sent a delegation to Nam Bô to discuss the matter, but demanded, as a precondition, the return of two Vietnamese provinces in Nam Bô. Kieman, 'Khmer Communism,' pp. 163-64.}

Whatever the case, the failure of the CIC helps explain why, in early 1946, a number of Cambodian resistance leaders left Nam Bô and went to Thailand where the Khmer Issarak was active.\footnote{Phạm Nguyễn Long, \textit{et. al.}, \textit{Campuchia: Đài Nước Yêu Thương Tướng Đập Bất Khựu} [Cambodia: Land of Indomitable Cheer], (Hanoi: NXBKHXH, 1980), p. 65 and Kieman, 'Khmer Communism,' p. 164.} As has been mentioned, the Khmer Issarak got its start in Bangkok in 1940. In 1941, \textit{Phra} Phiset Phanit claims that he presided over the formation of a second Khmer Issarak movement that continued to function into the postwar period.\footnote{Interview of \textit{Phra} Phiset Phanit by Steven Heder, 3 June 1981, Bangkok. Dap Chhuon was also a member. See also: Kieman, \textit{How Pol Pot}, p. 53.}
David Chandler has written that in 1945 the Khmer Issarak was set up with a government-in-exile in Bangkok. To the Viet Minh leaders in Nam Bò, the disintegration of the CIC, the departure of Cambodian resistance leaders to Thailand, and the rapidly expanding French military presence in the south must have left them isolated from Cambodian resistance groups in Thailand at the very time they needed their cooperation most. If true, this would also go far to explaining why Trần Văn Giầu and Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, in particular, went to Thailand in early 1946 with instructions to build better ties with the Cambodians.

Trần Văn Giầu explained in a 1989 interview that by dispatching him to Thailand, the Viet Minh had instructed him "to organise the Cambodian resistance movement in Cambodia and the Lao movement in a part of southern Laos." In December 1945, the communist Party journal, Sự Thật (The Truth), echoed this concern writing that the French used control of Vietnamese-Lao-Cambodian road (route des trois frontières) to attack Nam Bò. To Vietnamese strategists, without a viable Khmer resistance movement in Cambodia, the French had a free hand in Cambodia to attack Nam Bò from its western flank. As Giầu described the Viet Minh's thinking:

The Viet Minh wanted to organise a resistance in Cambodia to allow the Cambodian people to rise up as well as to divide the strength of the French in Nam Bò. To prevent the French from concentrating their forces in this southern region any more, we needed to organise a resistance in Cambodia with an aim to helping the Cambodian people make a revolution as much as to strengthening [the security of] Nam Bò.

While some Vietnamese may have wanted to help the Cambodians "rise up," the main Vietnamese interest in building better relations with the Cambodians was based on the need to counter French military actions in southern Vietnam. Ironically, with most of the major Cambodian resistance leaders now working from Thailand and western Cambodia, the Vietnamese found Thailand to be a much more favourable location than Nam Bò for building cooperation with the Cambodian resistance. The sympathy of the Thai government for Viet Minh resistance activities in Thailand made this alternative all the more attractive, especially in light of Bangkok's opposition to concurrent French demands for return of Cambodian territories lost to Bangkok in 1941. Moreover,

63 Interview with Trần Văn Giầu, 3 April 1989, Hồ Chí Minh City.
64 Ibid.
because the Thais still controlled the Cambodian territories of Battambang, Sisiphon, and a considerable portion of Siemreap, these territories were, by and large, safe from direct French military interference. Lastly, by working with the Khmer resistance in Thailand, the Viet Minh would have access to the financial and military resources which the Vietnamese communities in Thailand and western Indochina could provide. From the outset, Giàu said, Viet Minh leaders in Thailand had relied upon the Vietnamese population in Thailand and Cambodia to support their efforts to build a stronger Cambodian resistance movement.65 These communities provided money, supplies, recruits, and bases for the Vietnamese and Cambodian fighters who would come to work in the area.66 All of these factors combined to make Thailand a favourable location from which the Viet Minh could intensify their cooperation with Cambodian resistance fighters.

According to Vietnamese sources, sometime at the beginning of 1946, after meetings between DRV and Cambodian resistance representatives in Bangkok, the Khmer National Liberation Committee (Kana Cheat Mouta Keaha Mocchim Nokor Khmer, KNLC) was set up in Thai-controlled Battambang. With the assistance of the Viet Minh and "overseas Vietnamese resistance forces" operating in the area, the KNLC was designed to help the Cambodians organise an effective resistance force to fight the French in conjunction with the Viet Minh.67 The KNLC was reportedly led by Acan [professor] Duong, Son Ngoc Minh, a Khmer Issarak member, Me Muon, and possibly Dap Chhuon.68 Hoang Văn Hoan tells us in his memoir that when this Committee had consolidated its strength enough, it "brought its forces into Cambodia to work in the areas of Tonle Sap, Battambang, and the area of northwestern Cambodia."69 When it was actually active in Cambodia, it sought to develop links with the peasants in the countryside and in the mountaineous regions. However, it appears that until the Committee could stand on its

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65 A 1950 Cambodian census estimated the Vietnamese in Cambodia to number 319,596 out of a total population of 4,073,967. Of this, 15,923 were said to be in Battambang province; 9,649 in Pursat (including Tonle Sap province and Koh Kong); 2,278 in Siemreap (incl. Oudar Mean Chey); and 5,310 in Kompong Thom (incl. Preah Vihear prov). The total Vietnamese population for the north and western part of Cambodia equalled 33,160. See: Peter A. Poole, 'The Vietnamese in Cambodia and Thailand: Their Role in Interstate Relations,' Asian Survey, Vol. 14, No. 4, (April 1974), p. 328, fn. 6 and Table 1, p. 332.

66 'Kieu Minh,' p. 1M; 'Đy Thạo: Tím Hiếu về Đảng CPC' [An Outline: A Study of the Cambodian Communist Party], Hanoi, p. 8; and Interview with Trần Văn Giàu, 3 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City. We shall return to this topic. From the evidence available, this was the first time the Vietnamese resistance movement in Thailand had relied upon overseas Vietnamese communities in Cambodia.

67 Sources for this fact are: Thanh Đôm, op. cit., p. 75; Nguyễn Hao Hüng, op. cit., p. 144, especially fn. 2; and Trần Thanh Pôn, 'Người Khmer Nam bộ là Cộng Dân của Nước Cộng Hòa Xã Hội Chủ Nghĩa Việt Nam Góp Phần Vun Dắp Truyền Thông Đoàn Kết Dân Tranh cho Độc Lập Trí Do của Hải Dân Tộc Vietnam-Campuchia' [The Role of the Khmer Citizens of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in Nam Bộ in Fostering a Spirit of Mutual Resistance for the Independence and Freedom of both the Vietnamese and Cambodian Peoples] in Hội Nghị Khóa Học, p. 155; Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 306; and Interview with Trần Văn Giàu, 3 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City. These Vietnamese sources appear to imply that the Viet Minh presided over the creation of the KNLC. While this may turn out to be the case, without access to Cambodian sources, it would be premature to accept the Vietnamese version as the last word on the KNLC. It appears that this KNLC is to be distinguished from the one of the same name that was set up in 1948.

68 Interview with Trần Văn Giàu, 3 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City.

69 Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 306.
own feet, it remained on Thai soil, probably in Thai-controlled Battambang or Siemreap.70

In June 1946, Vietnamese links with the Cambodians were further strengthened by the establishment of a Vietnamese communist party cell in Battambang province. According to Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, this cell was to play a part in the defence of the Vietnamese nation and to contribute to the "process of constructing the People's Revolutionary Party of Cambodia," although Sơn does not tell us what this "Party" was.71 The Vietnamese sought to use the Battambang cell to contact the Khmer Issarak in an effort "to link together in the struggle against the French," suggesting that the Viet Minh had not won over the support of all Cambodian resistance activists. Step-by-step the Khmers were able to strengthen their positions in Siemreap, Trakotoum, and Ampil in western Cambodia, receiving assistance from the Viet Minh in the formation of combined Vietnamese-Cambodian military command.72 A Vietnamese source says the Mekong I and Mekong II combat units helped the Cambodian resistance through this joint military liaison.73 Hoàng Văn Hoan seems to support this, writing in his memoir that overseas Vietnamese combat units went to Cambodia to conduct resistance activities and to assist the Cambodians in the fight against the French. These groups established bases in the mountainous areas around Dangrech and along the Thai-Cambodian border, and were linked to one of the Viet Minh's Cambodian Working Bureaus (Ban Cán Sỹ Miền) under the direction of the Nam Bô Resistance Committee.74

Vietnamese and US sources confirm that in early August 1946, 300-400 fighters, a combination of Khmer Issarak, KNLC, and Viet Minh adherents, briefly occupied the French-administered town of Siemreap before being repulsed by French troops sent from Saigon (see chapter 3).75 Giău, who said he was directly involved in the Siemreap operation, explained that in this manoeuvre the attacking force was following behind the Viet Minh’s Quang Trung group on a mission across Siemreap. The French were aware

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70 'Tín Hiệu,' p. 11. 
73 Nguyễn Hao Hung, op. cit., pp. 145-46. Hoàng Văn Hoan, on p. 287, says that Mekong I and II were formed in 1947. It seems to this writer that if the Mekong I and II groups participated in the Siemreap attack (as we shall see they did), then they must have been organised prior to 1947, or August 1946 for that matter. Thanh Sơn, who was working directly with the Cambodians out of Thailand in 1946, would be a more reliable source concerning this fact. Hoan, as we shall see, did not arrive in Thailand until mid-1948. 
74 Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 306. A number of Vietnamese from Thailand also travelled to Cambodia to disseminate propaganda among the overseas Vietnamese communities there. 
of the Quang Trung operation and pursued it, evidently leaving the town of Siemreap vulnerable to combined Vietnamese—Khmer fighters.\textsuperscript{76} Nguyễn Thanh Sơn claims that the Mekong I and II units participated in this attack, marking what he sees as the first example of combined Viet Minh-Cambodian resistance efforts and the beginning of the Cambodian "armed uprising" against the French.\textsuperscript{77} However, this attack may not have been the success Sơn would have us believe. A Bangkok Post investigation revealed that many Khmer Issarak partisans failed to pull the pins out of their grenades when they attacked and did not know how to use the weapons at their disposal.\textsuperscript{78} Hoan says that the KNLC soon crumbled because of internal fighting, without making any mention of the state of Vietnamese-Cambodian relations.\textsuperscript{79}

\textbf{I. 5. Vietnam and the Franco-Thai Dispute}

It is not exactly clear what actions Vietnamese resistance leaders in Thailand took from June until August 1946, a time during which the Thais were involved in extremely tense negotiations with France over the Lao and Cambodian territories Bangkok gained in 1941, the same territories in which the Viet Minh were working. By this time, the Thai government had instructed Vietnamese resistance leaders in Thailand to desist from launching any attacks on French forces in western Indochina from Thai soil.\textsuperscript{80} Besides giving French military forces a pretext to enter Thailand in pursuit of the Vietnamese, such attacks could also be used by the French to break off negotiations with Bangkok in Washington concerning Thai claims to the territories. This is exactly what French authorities in Indochina did in early August following the Siemreap incident. It also seems likely that while the Viet Minh continued their work in eastern Thailand and in the Thai-held Cambodian provinces during this time, they were also closely following the course of Franco-Thai negotiations. Because Viet Minh leaders in Thailand were almost certainly aware of the negative ramifications which would stem from failed Franco-Thai negotiations, its seems likely that instructions were sent to field commanders to desist from making attacks on the French from Thai soil that might undermine Franco-Thai negotiations. Strategically speaking, continued Thai control of the Cambodian territories was in Vietnam's interest.

It is worth noting that two Vietnamese-language newspapers published in Hanoi in 1946 took very sympathetic views of Bangkok's claim to the Indochinese territories. In mid-July, as the Thais tried to take their case to the United Nations, heretofore

\textsuperscript{76} Nguyễn Hao Hưng, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 145-46 and Interview with Trần Văn Giảu, 3 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City.

\textsuperscript{77} Nguyễn Hao Hưng, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 144, especially fn. 2 and pp. 145-46 and Ben Kiernan, 'Khmer Communism,' p. 164.

\textsuperscript{78} 'Unrest Grips Province as Retrocession Nears,' \textit{BP}, 2 November 1946.

\textsuperscript{79} Hoang Văn Hoan, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 306.

\textsuperscript{80} Wichan, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 42-43.
straightforward summaries of the Franco-Thai dispute in these papers were suddenly replaced by surprisingly pro-Thai editorials, all published within the same week. On 19 July, Dọc Láp (Independence), printed an editorial entitled The Franco-Siam Dispute: A Look Into the Past. This article briefly reviewed the 1940 Franco-Thai conflict before turning its attention to French efforts to force Thailand to return the territories in 1946. The writer of this article noted that the timing between France's consolidation of power in Laos and the outbreak of border incidents between the Thais and French in May may not have been coincidental.

After France had re-established its rule in Cambodia and Laos, the French colonialists suddenly looked for a way take revenge on Thailand. On the one hand, they demanded return of the territories and, on the other hand, they launched many invasions into Thailand.81

On 21 July, Dọc Láp published a second, frontpage editorial in which it hinted that rumours in Thailand that the French might have been behind the alleged assassination of the Thai King in June could not be dismissed. As for the Franco-Thai dispute, this writer considered the Thai case against the French to be a "truly reasonable, clear-cut, and deserving one."82

On closer examination, the situation is becoming increasingly more tense between Siam and France. On the one hand, the French, without rhyme or reason, have invaded Siam in order to demand return of several territories which the French had formerly forced Siam to concede to Cambodia. . . . On the other hand, in order to deal with the hard-line taken by the French, Siam has brought the dispute directly to the attention of the United Nations for arbitration.83

On 25 July, the Vietnamese newspaper, Dân Chữ, published the first of a two-part editorial series on the Franco-Thai dispute. This essay was entitled Why is there a Franco-Thai Dispute? and was signed by T.L. At the outset, the author stated that because the Thais had taken the Franco-Thai dispute to the Security Council, the matter was of interest to Vietnam. In discussing the capitulation of France to Germany in 1940, the T.L. wrote that "naturally Thailand took advantage of this rare opportunity to realise its programme called 'The Pan Thai Movement.'" Commenting on Franco-Thai negotiations in 1946, T.L. urged Thailand to bring the dispute before the UN, dismissing as groundless French claims that they attacked Thailand in May in order to suppress

81 'Th bicy Luân: Cuộc Xung Đột Pháp-Xiêm-Nhìn Vào Qúa Khứ' [Commentary: The Franco-Siamese Dispute: A Look into the Past], Dọc Láp, 19 July 1946, No. 201, p. 1. Dọc Láp was a paper of the Vietnam Democratic (Party) which was in the Viet Minh coalition.
82 Ibid.
guerillas. Ridiculing this French allegation, T.L. wrote that "whenever France wants to occupy an area, there will undoubtedly be guerillas to suppress!"\(^4\)

In the second part of this series, the pro-Thai line became even more remarkable. This editorial, entitled *The Franco-Siam Conflict: Where is It Going?*, was signed by "H.H." In the opening paragraph, H.H. stated that there was nothing wrong with the Thai decision in 1941 to reclaim the Lao and Cambodian provinces which the French had forced them to cede earlier. It was only now that the Japanese had surrendered that the "French wanted to steal these territories" back from the Thais. H.H. challenged the French line of argumentation that because Thailand had collaborated with the Japanese during WWII, Bangkok therefore had no rightful claim to the provinces:

That is an extremely weak position to take, for numerous detestable Frenchmen opened the door to welcome warmly the Japanese into Indochina and the whole of the Pacific. If one speaks of who committed the greater crime in its relations with Japan, then France is still more to blame than Siam.\(^5\)

H.H. also wrote that French military action against the Thais in May had been designed to provoke an incident with Bangkok rather than to suppress insurgents operating out of Thailand. H.H. scorned the French claim that they had only brought weapons to the Thai-French Indochina border in order to fight guerillas. To this author: "That was just a threatening deceit."\(^6\)

On 20 October, as the Thais prepared to return the Indochinese territories, *CiRu Quốc* published an article expressing concern about the very large number of overseas Vietnamese living in the Thai-controlled province of Battambang, asking what would happen to them if the Thais returned this province to the French. The piece concluded by calling on Hanoi to get in touch with the the Bangkok government.\(^7\)

### Part II: The DRV's Diplomatic Office in Bangkok

In mid-1946, while Hồ Chí Minh was engaged in negotiations in France, the Vietnamese Minister of the Interior, Vô Nguyên Giáp, cleared the way for the dispatch of the DRV's new diplomatic representative to Thailand, Nguyễn Đức Quý. Travelling on a Chinese passport, Quý, along with another Vietnamese representative, Phạm Ngọc

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\(^4\) "Tại Sao Có Cuộc Xung Đ&t Pháp-Xiêm?" [Where is there a Franco-Siamese Conflict?], *Dân Chủ* (Democracy), 25 July 1946, No. 275.

\(^5\) "Sự Rắc Rổi Pháp-Xiêm Sẽ Đi đâu?" [Where is the Franco-Siamese Disturbance Leading?], *Dân Chủ*, 26 July 1946, No. 276. I have been unable to determine how Cambodian resistance groups felt about these matters.

\(^6\) *Ibid.* Further comments by H.H. on the May incidents have been deleted by a censor.

\(^7\) *CiRu Quốc*, 20 October 1946, No. 381.
Thạch, left for Thailand. In August, as the French were sending troops to the Thai border, Quý and Thạch arrived in Bangkok to begin discussions with Thai leaders concerning the DRV's desire to expand its diplomatic activities in Thailand.88

As we saw in chapter 3, Nguyễn Đức Quý had reportedly been selected by Hồ Chí Minh during the Tân Trào Conference a year earlier. He was a non-communist and a member of the Democratic Party. Thạch, on the other hand, was a clandestine ICP member from the south, as well as Hồ Chí Minh's personal doctor and a trusted adviser. In September 1945, he was a member in the People's Committee for the South and presided over the Vanguard Youth League. Fluent in French and proficient in English, Thạch travelled to Bangkok as the DRV's Under-Secretary of State.89

II.1. Thailand's Strategic Position

The reasons underpinning Hanoi's decision to send two ranking officials to Bangkok in mid-1946 were largely strategic. Firstly, Chiang Kaishek had pulled most of his troops out of Indochina in June, thereby removing one of the major obstacles blocking French military action against northern Vietnam. Secondly, Chiang had also closed off the "China Road" to the Vietnamese in 1946 by denying them important rearbases in southern China. Although the Chinese Communists were able to make contact with DRV representatives through the north, it appears to have been very limited until the Chinese Communist achieved major victories in Manchuria in late 1948.90 Thirdly, the French were strengthening their military positions in the meantime at key strategic points along the Sino-Vietnamese border in accordance with the 6 March agreement. Fourthly, by mid-May the French had further threatened the DRV's security by retaking all of Laos, a development which put the French on Hanoi's western flank. Taken together with the threats mentioned at the opening of this chapter, by mid-1946 Vietnam's security was under pressure from every direction.91

Compounding this situation was Hanoi's difficulty in contacting the international community. Hoàng Nhật Tân, who worked in Thailand after WWII, pointed out that because of the disbanding of the Comintern in 1943, it was very difficult for Hanoi to

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88 Interview with Nguyễn Đức Quý, 5 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City.
89 Ibid, and 'Organisation de L'Autorité Politico Militaire Adverse en Indochine,' Juin 1948, p. 38. Considering Quý's subsequent appointment to work in the DRV Embassy in Moscow and position as a DRV Minister of Culture in the 1960s, it seems possible that he may have joined the Communist Party at some point.
90 Chen, op. cit., pp. 187-94. While details of Chinese communist assistance to the DRV between late 1945 and 1949 are few, Chinese Communist forces along the Sino-Vietnamese border appear to have been small during this time, subject to frequent Nationalist patrols which forced them to keep on the move. Chen says that in Yunnan the Viet Minh were able to gain access to certain Chinese border cities under the control of Lu Han, who had worked with Hồ earlier and was not hostile to the Viet Minh. See chapter 6.
91 In separate interviews, Nguyễn Đức Quý and Hoàng Nhật Tân singled out the encircled position of the DRV as a key strategic reason explaining the expansion of the DRV's diplomatic activities in Thailand in mid-1946.
contact the Soviet Union. Communication with the Asian region and the West was also difficult. Without up-to-date information and intelligence on changes in international affairs, the Vietnamese decision-making process was under-informed at a time when French authorities in Indochina had begun to take a more aggressive line toward Hanoi, especially after the signing of the September *Modus Vivendi*. If Vietnamese leaders were going to keep negotiations on track and counter French attempts to gain international support, then they needed better access to Western and Asian governments, the international media and information services, and some sort of diplomatic representation abroad.

Bangkok offered such favourable conditions. Firstly, most Western nations had diplomatic representation in Bangkok immediately after the war. Secondly, newly independent Asian nations had or were in the process of establishing diplomatic relations with Thailand. Thirdly, Bangkok was geographically located at the centre of Asia, close to Hanoi, and linked to the rest of the world by air, sea, and international telecommunications systems. Considering the support of postwar Thai leaders for the Vietnamese thus far, the DRV obviously hoped to take advantage of the favourable conditions in Thailand to establish an outlet to the region and the world, without having to fear direct French interference as in Indochina.

Upon arriving in Bangkok, Quy and Thạch, together with Trần Văn Giàu (and no doubt others), entered negotiations with Thai officials concerning the possibility of establishing diplomatic representation in Bangkok. Phạm Ngọc Thạch forwarded a letter from Hồ Chí Minh to Pridi and discussed the matter of establishing a delegation and the need for stepped-up cooperation against colonialism. At the time, the Thais were involved in very tense negotiations with the French and a related bid to join the UN, and were thus apparently reluctant to risk upsetting their fragile negotiations with Paris by recognising the DRV officially. However, they did agree to recognise the DRV unofficially by allowing the Hồ Chí Minh government to establish an office in Bangkok, known as the Representational Office of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (*Văn Phóng Đại diện Việt Nam Dân Chủ Cộng Hòa*). This office was also referred to as the Vietnam Delegation for South East Asia and shared the premises of the VNS on Silom Road at the outset.

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92 Interview with Hoàng Nhật Tân, 5 May 1989, Hanoi.
93 Ibid.
94 Hoàng Văn Hoan uses this title in his memoir and refers to Quy as the "representative of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam." He also uses the terms "representational office" (*văn phòng đại diện*) and the term "delegation" (*phái đoàn*) interchangeably. So did Quy in my interview with him in April 1989. Strictly speaking, these terms, "delegation" and "representational office," imply unofficial recognition. The DRV's delegation in Thailand was neither a legation nor an embassy; both these terms would have meant official Thai recognition.
95 Australia, DEA, 'Letter from Nguyễn Đức Quy to the Australian Foreign Minister, H.V. Evatt,' 22 May 1948 in CRS A1838/2; 381/1/3/1, AA.
The Thai decision to allow the Vietnamese to establish a delegation in Bangkok was very propitious. By the time the delegation was actually functioning sometime in October or November 1946, French authorities in Indochina were making preparations to retake northern Vietnam. A number of Vietnamese officials who worked in Thailand during this period pointed out in interviews in 1989 that the Thais were among the very first to recognise—though unofficially—the DRV.  

II.2. The Delegation

According to Nguyễn Đức Quy, five officers formed the core of the DRV delegation in Bangkok. Proficient in English, Thai, French and Chinese, Quy was the President of the delegation and the ranking Vietnamese official based in Bangkok. In addition, Quy was also designated the DRV’s representative to Southeast Asia. Trần Văn Gineau focused his work on military matters and also played a part in directing Vietnamese military operations from Thailand and western Indochina, as well as assisting the Lao and Khmer resistance movements. Lê Hy (alias Vinh Lợi) was chief of the Vietnam News Service (VNS). Nguyễn Văn Trong was a Colonel in the DRV’s army, responsible for purchasing military equipment and arms. Lastly, Bao Ân, a Vietnamese Buddhist priest who had long lived in Thailand, tended to overseas Vietnamese affairs.

Besides this group, there were other important members as well, some assigned directly to the delegation, others peripherally linked from their posts in northeast Thailand, Laos, or Cambodia. Phạm Ngọc Thạch, whom we have mentioned already, worked in the delegation in Bangkok as the DRV’s shuttle diplomat. Also working on diplomatic affairs was Dr. Trần Văn Luân. He met with foreign diplomats, published articles in the VNS and Bangkok Post supporting Vietnam’s case against the French, and represented the DRV at international conferences. Another Vietnamese who merits mention is Nguyễn Văn Lòng. A native of central Vietnam, Lòng was said to have been fluent in Thai and Lao as well as French and English. In 1945, he was the communist

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96 As of 1946, the Soviet Union had not yet recognised the DRV. This would not happen until 1950. According to an agreement in the 6 March Accord, the French allowed the DRV to administer a non-official delegation in Paris. Hồ Ngọc Giâm, Under-secretary of the Interior, was in charge of the delegation at the beginning. In November, Trần Ngọc Danh took over. See: The Outbreak of War, p. 111; Philippe Devillers, op. cit., p. 451; and Interview with Hồ Nhât Tấn, 5 May 1989, Hanoi.

97 After WWII, the DRV dispatched a number of diplomatic representatives to Asia and the West. Representing the DRV government in India and Burma was Mai Thế Châu; Malaya, Nguyễn Ngọc Vỹ; Singapore, Phạm Văn Phúc; the US, the Secretary of the Vietnam-American Friendship Association, Phạm Duy An; Great Britain, Nguyễn Văn Nhãn; and France, Trần Ngọc Danh. There was also a representative in Czechoslovakia and most probably several in Moscow.

Secretary-General of the Overseas Vietnamese General Association and was instrumental in setting up guerilla camps along the Lao-Kengtung border. According to Alan Loomes, the Australian Consul-General in Bangkok in 1951, during his service in Thailand in 1946 and 1947, Long "cemented firm contacts" with "influential" Thai police officers, government officials, Thai intellectuals, and even "senior" Thai princes.99

Members of the delegation were in touch with many Thai government and military officials. If we can believe Quy, from the time of his arrival in Bangkok he could "meet with any Thai minister he wanted." Naturally, one of the most important Thai leaders with whom Quy met was Pridi. Even though Pridi had resigned in August 1946, he had remained an important power-behind-the-scenes over the course of the next year. Tieng Serikhan, the Deputy Minister of Interior, also continued to be leading Thai ally of the DRV.100

The new cabinet formed under the leadership of Rear-Admiral Luang Thamrong Nawasawat in August was also favourably inclined toward the members of the delegation. Quy met with Thamrong on at least one occasion to discuss the state of Thai-Vietnamese relations. The Minister of Industry, Thongin Phuriphat, was a longtime Vietnamese supporter who continued to provide the Vietnamese with military assistance. It was Thongin to whom Quy delivered his letter of authorisation from Võ Nguyên Giáp. Other longtime allies of the Viet Minh from WWII days included: the Acting Minister of Commerce, Chamlong Daoruang and ministers without portfolios, Thawi Udon and Thong Kantatham. While the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister, Direk Chaiyanam, did not allow the Thai government to recognise the DRV formally, Quy said that Direk nevertheless "sympathised" with the DRV and did not oppose the formation of the delegation. Before leaving for Europe, even the young Thai King granted Nguyễn Đức Quy an audience in 1946.101

Long went to France in the 1920s where he received a Doctor in Laws from the Sorbonne. During his study in France, he joined the French Communist Party and thereafter he travelled to Moscow for further study. In the mid-1930s, he returned to Indochina and during WWII worked as a reporter for the Singapore Herald. Loomes said that Long's contacts with the Thai court stemmed from his extensive knowledge of classical dance and oriental arts. Australia, DEA, 'Letter from Alan Loomes to T.K. Critchley, Office of the Australian Commissioner for Malaya, Singapore,' 27 June 1951, CRS A5019/1; 100/8/1 Part 2, AA and article by James Taylor, 'AAP-Reuter Mailer-Situationer' [no date given], enclosed in 'Letter from Loomes.'

Interview with Nguyễn Đức Quy, 5 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City.

Ibid. and Interview with Trần Văn Đình, 20 June 1990, Washington, DC. Not long after his arrival in Thailand, Quy met with the Vice-President of the National Assembly and Minister of Education, Duen Bunnak, the former Chief of Police and Minister of Defence and now the Commander-in-Chief of the Thai Armed Forces, General Adun Decharat, and the Chief of Police as well as the Minister of the Interior, Colonel Chiang Chawengsak Songkhram. Khuang Aphaiwong, a native of Battambang province and the leader of the opposition party, Prachatipatai (Democracy), also met with Quy. Interestingly, his brother, Chaowalit Aphaiwong, was, according to French intelligence, the Chef nominal du mouvement Khmer Issarak. Kukrit Pramot, another important member of the opposition with royal connections, also met with Quy in Bangkok. Interview with Nguyễn Đức Quy, 5 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City and US, DOS, 751G.92/4-248, 'Memorandum of Conversation between Aphaiwong and Stanton,' 2 April 1948, USNA, p. 1.
Besides the Thais, the delegation also provided the DRV an important contact point to the US Embassy in Bangkok through which the Vietnamese could channel important information to Washington. Vietnamese government representatives in Bangkok were in touch with the US Ambassador Edwin Stanton, Military Attaché, Lt. Col. William Law, and General Attaché, Col. James Thompson, who sent gifts (through Quy) to Hồ Chí Minh on the President's birthday. Following the outbreak of full-scale war in Indochina, this link was particularly important. In April 1947, Phạm Ngộc Thạch delivered two important memos to Stanton through Law concerning Franco-Vietnamese negotiations and the events leading to the outbreak of war in December 1946, as well as a request to General MacArthur expressing Vietnam's claims to Indochina's gold held in Tokyo since WWII. In May 1947, there was even talk between Stanton and the State Department concerning a possible trip by the US Consul at Saigon, Charles Reed, to Bangkok where he could meet with Trần Văn Giàu and Nguyễn Đức Quy.

Similarly, the delegation in Bangkok also acted as an important link for DRV leaders to the international press. This was particularly true in light of the fact that major news services assigned correspondents to Bangkok to cover Southeast Asia after WWII. On numerous occasions, the delegation relayed questions to Hồ Chí Minh from foreign journalists and made press statements according to government instructions. On 18 August 1946, representatives from twenty Thai-based newspapers convened at the Bangkok opera house to celebrate the Vietnamese national day. These journalists were joined by representatives from Thailand, Great Britain, and China. After speeches by Vietnamese delegates, the journalists drafted and sent a telegram to the DRV wishing it the best on national day.

II.3. Tasks of the Delegation

From the outset, the delegation in Bangkok was subordinate to the central government in Hanoi. However, it appears it was also linked to the Southern Resistance Committee. According to Hoan, internal to the delegation were a number of secret supply

102 US, DOS, 851G.00/4-1747, The Ambassador in Siam (Stanton) to the Secretary of State, 17 April 1947 in FRUS, (1947, Volume VI), p. 87. Stanton, who later became staunchly anti-communist, did not acknowledge Thạch's letters in writing, but he did instruct Law to inform Thạch orally that they had been received and relayed to the State Department. The US Embassy stayed in touch with Thạch for a period of time thereafter. Stanton considered Thạch to be an important source of information about internal developments in the DRV government. Stanton told Washington in May that Law was his main contact with the Vietnamese, Lao, and Cambodian resistance movements working out of Thailand. Law had allegedly begun making "informal and personal" contacts with these groups around December 1946. See: Ibid., pp. 88 and 93.

103 US, DOS, 851G.00/5-747: Telegram, The Ambassador in Siam (Stanton) to the Secretary of State,' 7 May 1947 in FRUS, (1947, Volume VI), p. 93.

104 'Chaw Wittnam Pet Chumnum Yindi Wan Chalong Wan Chat' [The Vietnamese Open a Meeting to Celebrate their National Holiday], Suphap Burut, 20 August 1946 and Trơ Bào & Xiểm Chào Mtrng Nọc Viêt Nam trong Ngay Quoc Khanh' [Newspapers in Siam Congratulate Vietnam on the Occasion of its National Day], Cửu Quốc, 29 August 1946, No. 331, p. 1.
arrangements for the Nam Bồ resistance, which were under the direction of the Southern Committee. Giầu referred to this supply bureau as the "Nam Bồ Supply Committee." The tasks of the DRV delegation can be divided into five general categories, although it must be kept in mind that there was considerable overlap between them. They are: 1) Intelligence gathering and the dissemination of information and propaganda; 2) Overseas Vietnamese affairs; 3) Diplomatic affairs; 4) Military affairs; and 5) Cooperation with the Lao and Khmer resistance organisations. We shall discuss the first two tasks here, reserving a detailed discussion of point three for the next chapter and points four and five for chapter 6.

II.3.1. The Vietnam News Service: Intelligence and Information

As editor of the VNS, Hy was an important member of the delegation. He was an ICP member from the south, a former editor of a resistance newspaper in Vietnam who had been active in Nam Bồ in 1945 and travelled to Thailand when hostilities broke out there. He had worked with Thai correspondents, such as Kulap Saipradit, Snoh Tanbunyun, a former Thai correspondent for the BBC and a professor at Chulalongkorn University, and Chawala Sukamanchand, a Thai reporter for The Bangkok Post and later for the Associated Press.

Under Hy's guidance, the VNS underwent a significant restructuring programme sometime in mid- to late 1946. Specifically, the quality of the VNS' weekly publication, Vietnam News, was improved and the circulation was increased as well. Pictures were increasingly used and a new lithographic process was begun, giving the paper a more professional appearance. For the most part, VNS publications included news items, speeches, editorials, letters, and essays. At a cost of about five baht, VNS pamphlets were printed primarily in English and French. Franco-Vietnamese negotiations and the war in the south were the top stories. Editorials usually explained the Vietnamese position in the Franco-Vietnamese conflict, targeting both Western and Asian readers. From Bangkok, publications were sent to embassies, governments, and overseas

105 Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 295.
106 Interview with Trần Văn Giấu, 3 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City.
108 'Vietnam Weekly Published Secretly Aboard Sampans,' Bangkok Post, 9 October 1946. If Hy arrived in Thailand after war broke out in Nam Bồ in September 1945, it would suggest that he may have been the "Hai" we referred to in chapter 3 as the head of the VNS in 1945.
109 Interview with Trần Văn Định, 31 December 1989, Washington, DC.
110 'Một Tờ Báo Việt Nam Xuất Bản Ở Vũng-Cắc' [A Vietnamese Paper is Published in Bangkok], Cứu Quốc, 8 September 1946, No. 366.
VIETNAM
A NEW STAGE IN HER HISTORY

ADICATION STATEMENT - DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE - CONSTITUTION - NATIONAL ANTHEM
ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT HO-CHI-MINH
VIETNAM NEWS PUBLICATION, JUNE 1947. 543 SLOM BANGKOK

With compliments of the Vietnam News Bureau
destinations.111 Assisting Hy in his English translations was an Australian communist whom Phạm Ngọc Thạch had brought from Singapore to work at the delegation (see picture next page).112

The editor of the *Bangkok Post* and a former OSS officer in Thailand at the end of WWII, Alexander MacDonald, often reprinted VNS stories in his English language daily and even used his facilities to print certain VNS publications.113 Thai papers also reprinted a number of VNS news stories.114 On other occasions, representatives from Chinese newspapers in Bangkok arrived at the VNS office to inquire about the policies of the DRV.115 Besides its English language publications, the VNS printed special articles in Vietnamese for the overseas Vietnamese in Thailand, informing them of changes in Vietnam, the policies of the government, and urging greater "unity" in the resistance against the French.116

Vietnamese delegates in Thailand established an additional public news organ called the International Liaison Centre of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (*Ban Liên Lạc Quốc Tế của Việt Nam Dân Chủ Cộng Hoà*). While it is unknown exactly what the function of this centre was, its title would suggest that it was an additional means by which the Vietnamese disseminated and gathered information to and from the international community.117

All of these improvements in the VNS underscored a growing interest on the part of Hanoi in the appearance, quality, and effectiveness of its diplomatic representation abroad. This was not without reason, considering French military actions in Indochina in late 1946.118 Hoàng Văn Hoan said that because of the location of the delegation and the VNS in Bangkok, the government was able to contact "fellow [communist] Parties, countries within the socialist camp, and democratic peoples." In Hoan's words, Thailand had become a "gateway to the world" for Vietnam during this time. He writes:

111 Interview with Nguyễn Đức Quý, 5 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City. The VNS had a link to the US through an American known as Mr. Vangly. He ran the Vietnam-American Friendship Association and disseminated many of the VNS' documents to US subscribers.

112 Hoàng Văn Hoan, *op. cit.*, p. 298. This was probably Alexander Brotherton.

113 For evidence supporting the conclusion that MacDonald printed and published VNS documents, see: *Vietnam: A New State in Her History*, (Bangkok: Vietnam News, June 1947). At the very bottom of the last page of this document are the following words in small print: "Printed and published by Alexander MacDonald at the Post Publishing Co., Ltd. Krung Kasem Road, June 1947." For evidence of MacDonald's support of the Vietnamese and Thais, see: Alexander MacDonald, *Bangkok Editor*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), p. 214.

114 Suphap Burnt and Mahachon were two, of many, papers to reprint VNS stories.

115 Interview with Nguyễn Đức Quý, 5 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City.

116 'Một Truyện Việt Nam,' *Cựu Quốc*, 8 September 1946, No. 366.


118 Hoàng Nhật Tân, 5 May 1989, Hanoi. As has been pointed out, the Vietnamese did have a similar representational office in Paris. However, it was much smaller and limited in its ability to function free of French interference. The DRV also had a representational office in Prague, Czechoslovakia; however, this office did not have near the manpower or the access to western countries which Bangkok could offer.
If Vietnam wanted to win over the support of outside world, to make the French people, as well as the people of the world, clearly understand the meaning of the Vietnamese resistance, and to [make them] oppose the terrible invasion by the French imperialists, then we had to guard this international gateway.\(^\text{119}\)

**II.3-2. The Delegation and the Overseas Vietnamese**

Besides the VNS, Hanoi’s other asset in Thailand was access to the large overseas Vietnamese community in Thailand. As we have already mentioned, the original number of permanent overseas Vietnamese in Thailand (around 30,000) had been increased significantly with the arrival of another 50,000 mainly Vietnamese refugees following the French reconquest of Laos. Hanoi realised that thousands of Vietnamese, strategically located in northeast Thailand and favourably inclined toward the DRV, was a force not to be overlooked. With a delegation established in Bangkok, the government now had a direct link to Vietnamese organisations located in northeast Thailand. According to Nguyễn Độc Quý, upon setting up the delegation one of his main tasks was to assist the large Vietnamese communities in northeast Thailand and to tend to the needs of those refugees who had fled there after the French reoccupation of Laos.\(^\text{120}\) A number of organisations were established to channel funds from the overseas Vietnamese in Thailand back to Vietnam, some of which included: The National Federation of Assistance to the Vietnamese People, Fund for Assistance of State, Vietnam Mutual Assistance Committee, and the Naval Revictualing Committee of Nam Bồ.\(^\text{121}\)

Links were formed between the delegation in Bangkok and overseas Vietnamese organisations in Udon, Ubon and other locations in Thailand, western Laos, and Cambodia.\(^\text{122}\) Unfortunately, the details of the relationship between the delegation and Vietnamese Communist organisations in northeast Thailand remains, to a large extent, a mystery (see chapter 6).

Since early 1946, we know that Trần Văn Giàu and others had sought to gain the support of the overseas Vietnamese communities in anti-French operations. Vietnamese communities in Thailand provided the Viet Minh with places to live, money, recruits, and supplies. One of the most important uses of overseas Vietnamese financial contributions was the purchase of arms. Much of the money donated by foreign nationals was forwarded to the delegation’s arms purchaser, who used the money to buy weapons from

\(^{119}\) Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 289.

\(^{120}\) Interview with Nguyễn Độc Quý, 5 April 1989, Hồ Chí Minh City. For copies of cables sent from the overseas Vietnamese in support of the DRV, see: ‘Diễn Văn của Kiều Bảo ở Xiêm Gửi Chính Phủ’ [A Telegram Sent by the Overseas Vietnamese in Siam to the Government], Dân Chủ, 10 August 1946, No. 313, p. 1 and Dân Chủ, 12 October 1946, No. 340 and Cửu Quốc, 13 October 1946 [circa], No. 374.

\(^{121}\) BP, 13 October 1948 and 'Broadcast Statement of Madame Bach,' 31 May 1951.
Ngày khai trương

VIỆT-XIÊM KIÊU LIÊN NGÂN HÀNG

NHA NGÂN HÀNG CHỮNG TÔI ĐỊNH BẢY TỬ NGÀY 8-6-46, MÔ CỦA GIAO ĐỊCH NHỮNG XÍEU BẢO CHỮNG TA Ô HẢI NGOẠI VÀ TẤT CẢ NHỮNG NGƯỜI NGOẠI QUỐC MUÔN GỦI TIỀN VỀ NUÔC, THẬT LÀ MAU CHÔNG ĐƯỢC VIỆC

Tiền phái tiền ít — Tiền để đánh nhiều lí — Góm các khóa ve công, thường, chúng tôi đều nhận cả.

CÁC LÔI GIAO ĐỊCH: Gọi tiền lưu ngày — Gọi tiền thương lý — Gọi tiền bằng phiếu — Tiền Việt-Nam, Quan kim, Quêc tịch, thứ nào cũng tiền.

CÁC LÔI CHO VAY TIỀN: Có vế bảo đảm — Có người bảo đảm — Có gỉy mà bảo đảm.

Gọi tiền về nước bằng DIỄN TĨN, BẢNG THÔ, BẢNG TÀU BAY.

Số giao dịch: số 19, phổ Mai hạc Đệ (trực Gia Long cũ), Hà-NỘI

Diễn thoái cua hàng số 1865 — Điện thoái phòng gỉy số 1855

[This advertisement is entitled: "Opening Day of the Siamese-Vietnamese Federated Bank," published in Đọc Lập, 11 June 1946]
the numerous arms dealers in Thailand.\textsuperscript{123} In April 1947, the VNS reported that in February and March of that year alone the Vietnamese in Thailand had contributed a total of 421,346 Hồ Chí Minh piastres to the National War Fund and "countless other items."\textsuperscript{124} In February 1947, Vietnamese workers in Nong Khai donated 1,800 baht to the Vietnam War Fund.\textsuperscript{125} According to French intelligence in late 1946, Trần Văn Giàu had two million in piastres at his disposal for the purchase of arms, equipment, and their shipment back to Vietnam. On 10 October, the French reported that 150 guns, twelve boxes of ammunition, and 400 grenades had been shipped from Thailand to Vietnam. On 15 October, 30 guns, two boxes of ammunition, and 80 grenades went to Vietnam. And between 15 October and 5 November 600 rifles, 50 boxes of ammunition, and 1,600 grenades left Thailand bound for Vietnam.\textsuperscript{126}

The garnering of resources from the overseas Vietnamese by the delegation was not limited to Thailand. Donations to the Resistance Fund came from Vietnamese nationals as far away as France, America, Taiwan, Japan, and Great Britain.\textsuperscript{127} In August 1946, an Overseas Vietnamese-Siamese Federated Bank (Viet-Xiem Kieu Liên Ngân Hàng) was set up on Gia Long street in Hanoi (see picture previous page). According to the advertisement for this bank, overseas Vietnamese in Thailand and the rest of the world were invited to transfer their donations to Vietnam via this bank's facilities. Money could be wired to the bank, sent overland, or delivered by ship or plane.\textsuperscript{128} It seems possible that because this was a joint Vietnamese-Thai bank, the Vietnamese intended for Bangkok to serve as the conduit for all money transfers coming from Thailand and elsewhere bound for the DRV. According to Lê Mạnh Trinh, during the first months of the resistance, Thailand was the major linking point between Vietnam and overseas Vietnamese communities abroad.\textsuperscript{129}

On 30 November, in the midst of the Haiphong and Lang Son incidents, Cựu Quốc announced in a front page story that a DRV government representative was in Thailand on a special visit to Vietnamese communities living there.\textsuperscript{130} During these meetings, this delegate thanked the overseas Vietnamese on behalf of the government for their support

\textsuperscript{123} Interview with Nguyễn Độc Quý, 5 April 1946, Hồ Chí Minh City.
\textsuperscript{124} 'News about Vietnam Residents in Siam,' VNS, 5 April 1947. One baht equalled two Hồ Chí Minh piastres at this time.
\textsuperscript{125} 'Vietnamese in Nong Khay [Khái] with the Independence of Vietnam,' VNS, [New York], 28 February 1947.
\textsuperscript{126} SHAT, Carton 102, File No. 24, 'Trafic d'Armes,' Saigon, 2 December 1946.
\textsuperscript{127} Interview with Nguyễn Độc Quý, 5 April 1989, Hồ Chí Minh City. In September 1948, the VNS reported that Vietnamese nationals in New York had contributed US $600 to the Resistance Fund. The contribution was forwarded to the DRV delegation in Bangkok from the Secretary General of the American Friendship Association in New York. See: 'Vietnam Nationals in New York Contributed to the Resistance Fund,' VNS, 14 September 1948, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{128} Độc Lập, 8 June 1946, No. 167. See also: Issues 168 and 169.
\textsuperscript{129} CVDCQ, p. 68.
\textsuperscript{130} This may have been Phạm Ngọc Thạch.
and sacrifices. After reminding them of their responsibilities in the independence movement, the government's representative then outlined five specific guide-lines for the Vietnamese in Thailand in light of the increasingly volatile situation in Vietnam. It was agreed that the Vietnamese in Thailand would fully support the President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the following ways:

1) by standing ready to obey the government's orders; 2) linking together closely (doàn kết chặt chẽ) and fighting resolutely for national independence and unification; 3) opposing the repression launched by the reactionary French in Nam Bô, southern Trung Bô, and the provocations of the French army in Bắc Bô; 4) demanding that the French government implement the September *Modus Vivendi*; and 5) hailing the heroic fighting spirit of the nation.\(^{131}\)

By the time full-scale war broke out between the French and Vietnamese on 19 December 1946, the overseas Vietnamese in Thailand clearly had a place in Viet Minh strategic thinking.

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131 Quoted in 'Phái Viên Chính Pháp Việt Nam Thăm Kcesso Bạo & Xiêm' [A Vietnamese Government Delegate Visits the Overseas Vietnamese in Siam], Cửu Quốc, 30 November 1946, No. 422, with reference to 'Kcesso Bạo & Xiêm' [Overseas Nationals in Siam], Kháng Chỉnh [Resistance], 3 December 1946, No. 1, p. 2.
Chapter 5

Vietnam and the Southeast Asia League

With a delegation in operation in Bangkok by the end of 1946, the DRV was able to expand markedly their diplomatic contact with the international community. Of growing interest to the Vietnamese following the outbreak of war in Indochina were the emerging nations in Asia, and Southeast Asia in particular. Despite appeals by Indonesian and Indochinese leaders calling on the UN to prevent the return of European colonialism, it was clear to a growing number of Southeast Asian nationalists by 1947 that the western powers attached more importance to postwar Western European reconstruction than to Southeast Asian decolonisation. In this context, many anticolonialists in the region began discussing the possibility of forming a regional organisation to oppose European colonialism, with Thailand frequently put forward as an appropriate site for its headquarters. To DRV officials working in Bangkok, the possibility of a Southeast Asian regional organisation based in Thailand corresponded especially well with their diplomatic activities. In September 1947, the Southeast Asia League came to life under Thai and Vietnamese direction, surviving for a few months before falling victim to political changes in Thailand and the arrival of the Cold War to Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, because Vietnamese representatives stationed in Bangkok were the driving force behind the formation of this regional body, the League will serve as a useful vehicle to understand better the diplomatic work of the DRV in Thailand as the Vietnamese looked to the Southeast Asian region, Asia, and the world as a whole immediately after WWII.

Part I. Background to the Southeast Asia League

I.1. Southeast Asian Opposition to the Return of European Colonialism

Leading the call for the creation of Southeast Asian regional organisation in the postwar period was Vietnam. Of the newly independent nations in Asia immediately following WWII, Vietnam faced formidable obstacles to securing its national independence. Days after the French coup de force in Nam Bô in September 1945, Hồ Chí Minh expressed his hope to Archimedes Patti that the US "would restrain the French
in their colonial obsession" in Vietnam. In this connexion, Hồ also told Patti that he had
given thought to the necessity of forming a "pan-Asiatic community" consisting of
Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Malaya, Greater Burma (including Bengal), India,
Indonesia, and the Philippines. These nations, Hồ said, would promote "political and
economic programs for the common good" and live in peaceful co-existence with the US,
Great Britain, and France.¹

Although Hồ held out the hope that the US would help Vietnam, he recognised that
both the West and the Soviet Union balked at the idea of risking French support in
Europe by supporting the DRV's case. It was probably in this context that Hồ took
action on his pan-Asia idea in late 1945, signalled by a discernible shift in Vietnamese
foreign policy towards improving relations with Asian neighbours. One nation which Hồ
targetted in particular was Indonesia, a nation whose struggle for independence from the
Dutch was very similar to Vietnam's fight against the French. In November, he wrote a
letter to the Prime Minister of the Republic of Indonesia, Sutan Sjahrir, proposing that
"Viet Nam and Indonésia make a public declaration of their complete solidarity in their
present struggle for freedom." Hồ asked Indonesia to join Vietnam in appealing to
"India, Burma, and Malaya and all the subject peoples of Asia to join us in a common
front."² In his letter to Sjahrir, he also included a "Proposed Text of Common
Declaration by Viet Nam and Indonesia." In this document, Hồ said that because of the
failure of the "Great Powers" to prevent France and Holland from re-establishing their
colonial rule by force, "we must depend on ourselves and ourselves alone to win our
freedom." To the Vietnamese, promises made by the Allies during the war opposing the
return of colonialism were empty unless the French and Dutch were stopped. With this
not forthcoming, Hồ urged the Indonesians to join him in calling upon India, Burma and
Malaya to create a Preparatory Commission, aimed at "creating a Federation of Free
Peoples of Southern Asia." According to this proposal, the Federation would represent a
"common front" against colonialism and would play a part in the building of a "common
future" for Asia.³

To Hồ's disappointment, some in the Indonesian nationalist leadership were apparently
reluctant to support his proposal. Despite contrary advice from his advisers at the time,
Sjahrir chose not to answer Hồ's letters. According to the recollection of an associate
who discussed this issue with the Prime Minister, Sjahrir was worried that if Indonesia
cooperated with the DRV, the Dutch would try to use the Viet Minh's communist core to
taint the Indonesian independence movement. Sjahrir felt that the Indonesians would

¹ Patti, op. cit., p. 368. According to Patti, "Hồ regarded the United States as the avant garde of such a
movement."
² 'Letter from Hồ Chí Minh to the President of the Republic of Indonesia,' 17 November 1945 in Hanna
Papanek, 'Note on Soedjatmoko's Recollections of a Historical Moment: Sjahrir's Reaction to Ho Chi
Minh's 1945 Call for a Free Peoples Federation,' Indonesia, No. 49, (April 1990), p. 142.
³ 'Proposed Text of Common Declaration by Viet Nam and Indonesia' in Ibid., p. 143.
succeed in their independence struggle, but concluded that "if we ally ourselves with Ho Chi Minh, we will weaken ourselves and delay independence."4

Despite this set-back, the Vietnamese continued in their bid to gain increased Asian support. In March 1946, an editorial in a DRV newspaper, Độc Lập (Independence), picked up the regional grouping theme. Referring to a call by Pandit Nehru for a meeting of Asian nations to consider the formation of a Pan Asian Union, this article read in part:

... [T]he Pan Asia Union's strength would derive from the unification of every Asian nation, especially the small and weak nations. It would seek to attain freedom for every oppressed nation in Asia and build mutual prosperity for all of Asia. At a time when independence movements are breaking out throughout Southeast Asia, the Pan Asia Union will certainly be welcomed by every nation in Asia. Unlike the fascist Japanese 'Co-Prosperity Sphere,' the Pan Asia Union would be just and in accordance with the trend in human evolution towards freedom and happiness.5

Throughout 1946, the regional idea was taken up increasingly by Indochinese resistance leaders. As tension mounted in December 1946, the DRV, Khmer Issarak, and Lao Issara set up a Mixed Commission to co-ordinate their military cooperation and foreign policies. Significantly, this Mixed Commission also sought to form what it referred to as a Southeast Asian Federation. This grouping was intended to include Thailand, Burma, Indonesia and Malaya as well as the three members of the Commission.6 On 22 December, the desire of the Mixed Commission to form an organisation to stand against the European colonial powers was communicated to the Thai, Burmese, and Indonesian governments and the "nationalist group of Malaya."7

This discussion may not have been unrelated to two directives approved in the 22 December Vietnamese "Resistance Programme" which called for "linking up with the Vietnamese and Lao" and closer relations with the "Chinese [with no distinction made between Nationalist and Communist], Siamese, Indians, Burmese, [and] Indonesians."8

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4 This quote is as recalled by Soedjatmoko, cited by Hanna Papanek, 'Note on Soedjatmoko's Recollections of a Historical Moment,' op. cit., p. 144, cited with reference to Evelyn Colbert, 'Reconsiderations: The Road Not Taken: Decolonization and Independence in Indonesia and Indochina,' Foreign Affairs, (April 1973), p. 608.
5 Thọ Luận: Hội Liên-Hiệp Á-Âu hay la: Mùi Trần Dân Tổ Nhược Tiếu Á-Âu [Commentary: The Pan Asia Union or: The National Front of Small and Weaker Nations of Asia], Độc Lập, 30 March 1946, No. 111. It will be remembered that the Viet Minh's political programme of 1941 did mention the importance of cooperating with Asian neighbours, in particular Burma and India, in the fight against the Japanese. And from mid-1944 onwards, the Viet Minh singled out the importance of "linking closely with fellow Southeast Asian revolutions." During the war, the Viet Minh had reportedly asked the "resistance government of China to convene a Pan Asian Conference, consisting of delegates from every oppressed Asian country, to determine the ways by which Asians would join together to fight fascist Japan and its lackeys." See: Trần Huy Liệu, Vol. 10, op. cit., p. 40 and pp. 96-97 and Chapter 2 of this thesis.
6 Nakon San, 15 July 1947. Nakon San published parts of the letter which the editors received from the Foreign Minister of the Lao Issara, Prince Souphanouvong. It remains unclear why the Philippines was omitted.
7 Ibid. Ban Nghịen Cửu Lìch Sư Quan Dệ Thục Cực Chính Trị, lịch sử quân đội nhân dân Việt Nam [A History of the People's Army of Vietnam], (Hanoi: NXBQDND, 1974), pp. 253-55 and 258-59 and 'Chi
On 1 January 1947, representatives from the DRV, Khmer Issarak, and the Lao Issara held a meeting in Bangkok to discuss the formation of a Southeast Asian Federation. Like (or possibly as a reiteration of) the 22 December proposal, this Federation was to consist of Thailand, Burma, Malaya, Indonesia, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia without making any reference to the Philippines.9 Indochinese leaders also decided at this meeting that a document describing the goals of the Federation would be sent to Washington via the US Embassy in Bangkok so that US policy-makers would know of its agenda. In the same document, an appeal was made to the US and UN to "intervene without delay in [the] situation [in] Indochina."10 A change occurred, however, when the Indochinese representatives asked the American Ambassador, Edwin Stanton, to channel the document to the United Nations and not to Washington as intended earlier. On 7 January, Stanton informed Washington of this matter, advising that the document be relayed to the UN Secretary-General.11

The State Department responded on 8 January, instructing Stanton to return the document to the three Indochinese representatives in Bangkok and desist from forwarding any messages to the UN on behalf of the Indochinese.12 US officials maintained that the State Department was not the "proper channel [to] transmit memoranda to the [Security] C[ouncil] from 'free' groups claiming [to] represent nationalist movements [in] Indochina."13

Undeterred, representatives of the Indochinese nationalist governments in Bangkok continued in their efforts to win international sympathy, with a continued focus on Asia. In January, Hồ Chí Minh sent letters to the leaders of Nationalist China, India, and Burma in which he described French efforts to disrupt peace in the region, pointing out that as "a part of the great Asian family," Vietnam's "fate is intimately linked to the destiny of all Asian peoples." Hồ ended his letters to his Asian counterparts by representing the French attack on Vietnam as a threat to all of Asia: "French colonialism seeks to crush Vietnam, that is, it wants to destroy the great Asian family."14

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9 Khonthi Sukamomkhon, Kanwithesobai khong Thai [Thai Foreign Policy], (Bangkok: Thammasat University Press, 2528 [1985]), p. 450. Following WWII, Khonthi was the head of Department of Western Affairs in the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
10 Ibid., p. 450 and US, DOS, 851G.00/1-747, 'Confidential Telegram from the Minister in Siam (Stanton) to the Secretary of State,' 7 January 1947 in FRUS (1947, Volume VI), p. 56.
11 'Telegram from the Minister in Siam,' 7 January 1947, p. 56.
12 Khonthi, op. cit., p. 450 and FRUS (1947, Volume VI), p. 57, fn. 24. Souphanouvong indicated in his letter to the Nakon San (15 July 1947) that the UN never responded to this appeal.
14 Hồ Chí Minh, Thư Gửi các Lãnh Thụ và Nhân Dân các Quốc Nhập Dịp Tết Nguyên Dịp 1947' [Letter to the Leaders and People of the World on the Tet Lunar New Year, 1947], 10 January 1947, Hồ Chí Minh: Toán Tập Tập 4, 1945-1947 [Hồ Chí Minh: Complete Works, Volume 4, 1945-1947], (Hanoi: NXBST, 1984), pp. 245-46. It should be mentioned that the compilers of Hồ's works often changed the titles of documents without indicating it in the text. Immediately after war broke out in Indochina, the DRV
Such pleas did not go unnoticed by leaders in the region. In early January, the former premier of Burma, Dr. Ba Maw, announced that a Burmese voluntary expeditionary force would go to Indochina to help the Vietnamese in the struggle against France. The leader of this expeditionary force, Colonel Bo Yan Naing, told a Reuters correspondent that his contingent would number about one-hundred Burmese volunteers, adding that this force "will symbolize Burmese support for the Vietnamese cause."

In a subsequent letter to the Burmese independence leader, Aung San, Hồ personally thanked him for "the things which you have done and will do" for the Vietnamese resistance. Shortly thereafter, Hồ wrote a similar letter to Nehru, wishing India the best on its independence day and calling for closer cooperation between the two countries. Two days after that, it was reported that a decision had been made by Bo Yan Naing and Sarat Chandra Bose (a member of Nehru’s cabinet and brother to the deceased leader of the Indian National Army, Subhas Chandra Bose), to dispatch a joint Indo-Burmese volunteer force to Indochina to fight the French "provided that necessary facilities were available."

Malaya also supported the Vietnamese against the French. With banners reading "Long Live the DRV" waving in the wind, a crowd estimated at five-thousand met in Singapore in early February to show its support of Vietnam against the French. Speeches were made by representatives of the Malay Nationalist Party, the Malaya Democratic Union, the Malayan Communist Party, Lumbaga Kesatuan Melayu Johore, and the Malaya Trade Union. The leader of the Malayan Democratic Union said that "the future of Malaya is bound up with the fate of Vietnam and we must not allow the Vietnamese to instructed a representative to ask the Indian government for assistance. See: D.R. SarDesai, Indian Foreign Policy in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, 1947-1964, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 11. On 28 February, Radio Vietnam made a special plea for assistance from the world, specifically mentioning the Asian countries of India, China, Burma, Thailand, and the Philippines. See: VNS, 28 February 1947.

15 'Burmese to Assist Vietnam,' BP, 10 January 1947; Australia, DEA, 'Extract from SACSEA Communiqué SD 1161 (SEC 1378),' 24 February 1947, CRS A1838/2; 466/1/1 Part I, AA; and US, DOS, .00/1-2147, 'The Chargé in the United Kingdom (Gallman) to the Secretary of State, 21 January 1947 in FRUS (1947, Volume VII), p. 65. Colonel Bo Yan Naing was a twenty-seven year-old Burmese leader who was a former colonel in the Burmese Defence Army during the Japanese occupation and was the son-in-law and former military secretary of Ba Maw. Ba Maw had reportedly been assisting the Vietnamese at the behest of the DRV’s representative in New Delhi, Mai Thê Chău.

16 Hồ Chí Minh, 'Dën Gủi Ông Ôn-San, Phó Chủ Tịch Chính Phủ Nước Миф-Diênń [Cable Sent to Aung-San, the Vice-President of the Burmese Government], 27 January 1947, Hồ Chí Minh: Toàn Tập, p. 259. See also: US, DOS, .00/2-2448, 'Memorandum of Conversation, by the Ambassador in Siam (Stanton), 24 February 1948 in FRUS, (Volume VI, 1948), pp. 22-3. It is unclear what, exactly, Hồ is referring to when he thanks Aung San for "things you have done" for Vietnam. It could be a reference to the decision to dispatch an expeditionary force to Indochina, but the possibility that Hồ is referring to other types of aid provided by Burma should not be ruled out. There is ample evidence suggesting that the Burmese, like the Thais, were secretly helping the DRV against the French.


18 D.R. SarDesai, op. cit., p. 12 and BP, 1 February 1947. Under Bose’s direction in 1947, a "Vietnam Brigade" was put together from volunteers in Pondicherry, a French concession in India. Bose’s volunteer force never left India, for Nehru refused to provide it transport or financial assistance, saying that "so long as the Government of India is not at war with another country, it cannot take aggressive action against it." See: D.R. SarDesai, op. cit., p. 12 and Ton That Thien, India and South East Asia, 1947-1960, (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1963), p. 123.
be attacked," calling for aid and volunteers to travel to Vietnam as well as a domestic boycott of French goods and steamers arriving in Malaya.19

The sympathy which some Asians held for the Vietnamese struggle against the French was in contrast to the slowness with which the UN, the US, and the USSR had moved to support Southeast Asian claims to independence from the European colonial powers. This tardiness—often interpreted by nationalists as unwillingness—left many Southeast Asian leaders increasingly frustrated, questioning the sincerity of the West's intentions and wartime promises. In March, a Bangkok Post editorial made this point bluntly: "Rightly or wrongly, people of Southeast Asia began to decide that it is the UN's policy that their battles have no place on the agenda."20 Prince Souphanouvong concluded in a letter to the Thai paper, Nakon San, that "we cannot rely on the western powers, who have to rely on the help of France in their politics in Europe, and thus we have to rely on ourselves and our Asiatic brethren."21

Souphanouvong was not the only one of this opinion. On 1 March 1947, Filipino Brigadier General Carlos P. Romulo, the Philippine delegate to the UN, told the Philippine Academy of Foreign Affairs and Manila's delegates to the upcoming Inter-Asian Conference in New Delhi that he fully advocated the foundation of a Pan Asian Union, pointing out that the conference would show Asia's "new surge of power that has been latent for years" but checked by the "restraint of a subject race."22 Romulo, who had met Hồ Chí Minh before WWII,23 pointed out that "Vietnam too struggles for the independence the Philippines has but recently achieved."24 Like the Vietnamese and Indonesians, the Philippines looked to the Inter-Asian Conference to "focus attention on Asia and to give impetus to the fight to free Asia from colonialism."25

Days before the conference opened, another editorial appeared in the Bangkok Post, calling on Thailand to take the lead in the formation of a Southeast Asian regional organisation of some sort. Entitled Toward Unity, this editorial noted the "natural sentiment" among Southeast Asians to form a federation, asking:

Why should not Siam take the lead in uniting Southeast Asian nations? This country cannot be suspected of trying to dominate neighbouring giants like Burma and India. Siam does not have commercial infiltration built up in neighbouring lands. Siam could

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19 'Singapore Communities Support Vietnam Cause,' BP, 18 February 1947.
20 'Not on the Agenda,' BP, 21 March 1947.
23 US, DOS, 751G.00/3-1050, 'Top Secret Memorandum of Conversation by the Secretary of State,' 10 March 1950 in FRUS (1950, Volume VI), p. 751. Romulo revealed this information to the US Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, while discussing the legitimacy of the Bảo Đại government in 1950.
call representatives together without any accusations that she is trying to set up another "co-prosperity sphere". . . Siam should not only take part, but should assume some of the leadership of the cause.26

The New Delhi conference, this editorial argued, would provide the impetus for Southeast Asian regionalisation.

I.2. The Inter-Asian Conference

The Indochinese and the Indonesians, in particular, held out the hope that an Asian-sponsored conference would assist them in their fight against European colonialism. In preparation for the conference, the Indochinese Mixed Commission tried unsuccessfully to organise a meeting of representatives from Southeast Asian nations.27 On 23 March 1946, a ten day Inter-Asian Conference (also known as the Asian Relations Conference) was convened in New Delhi. This was an unprecedented meeting, attracting over 230 delegates from all over Asia to discuss Asian problems. Delivering the opening address of the conference, Nehru told the delegates that the overwhelming response from each country demonstrated the Asian desire to "meet together and advance together."28

Dr. Trần Văn Luân, a Vietnamese official in charge of foreign affairs at Bangkok, led the DRV delegation to the conference, consisting of Nguyễn Đức Quy, Trần Văn Giàu, and Mai Thế Châu.29 After almost failing to send any delegation at all, four civilians represented the Thais at New Delhi: Phya Anuman, Sukit Nikhamein, Chaluey Kanchankom, and Manot Wuthitya.30 The Philippines dispatched Manuel Enverga of the Institute of Foreign Affairs, while Indonesia sent a high-level delegation consisting of such officials as Sjahrir, the Prime Minister, Hadji Agus Salim, the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Major-General Abdul Kadir of the National Army, and Abu Hanifah.31 The Chinese and Indians also had high-profile delegations at the conference. To the

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27 Nakon San, 15 July 1947.
30 Australia, DEA, 'Australian High Commissioner to External Affairs, No. 87,' 6 March 1947, CRS A1068; M47/9/6/15 Part 1, AA. Phya Anuman was Vice-president of the Royal Institute of Siam and President of the Institute's Arts and Literary Section as well as Director-General of the Fine Arts Department. Chaluey Kanchankom was a lecturer in the Thai Faculty of Arts and Science of the Chulalongkorn University. Monot Wuthitya was a journalist who had worked in Malaya during the war. Sukit Nikhamein was Director-General of the Department of Vocational Instruction, an Assistant Proctor as the Head of the Mathematics Department and Secretary-General of the Chulalongkorn University, and he had made publishing facilities available to the VNS. See: Press Communiqué in 'Asian Relations Conference,' 23 March-2 April 1947 and Nag, op. cit., p. 46.
31 The Manila Times, 1 March 1947; 'Five-Point Plan to End Colonialism: Call for Joint Action by Asian Nations,' Statesman [India], 6 April 1947 and 'Australian Observers' Report on Asian Relations Conference,' p. 4, CRS A1068/1; M47/9/6/15, Part 3, AA.
disappointment of the DRV delegation, however, the organisers of the New Delhi Conference also allowed the French-backed governments in Cochincha, Laos, and Cambodia to send representatives to the conference.32

The conference aimed to discuss a wide range of topics, "providing a cultural and intellectual revival and social progress in Asia, independent of all questions of internal as well as international politics."33 Care was to be taken to avoid domestic issues or political and military problems.34 But this was an obvious problem, especially when one considers the eight specific subjects which were to be examined in roundtable discussions: 1) National Movements for Freedom in Asia; 2) Racial problems (with special reference to racial conflicts); 3) Migration and the Status of Immigrants; 4) Transition from Colonial to National Economy; 5) Agricultural Reconstruction and Industrial Development; 6) Labour and Social Services; 7) Cultural Problems; and 8) The Status of Women and Women's Movements in Asia.35

After some preliminary debate it was agreed that there could be no discussion of the "National Movements for Freedom" topic, in particular, without touching upon political matters.36 This group's agenda was focused on examining the independence movements in Burma, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Indonesia, Malaya, and Vietnam. In this discussion, delegates were for the most part agreed that freedom movements in Asia had received greater importance since the outbreak of WWII. Delegates also agreed that Japan's "Asia for the Asiatics," though designed to profit Japan, had given incentive to Southeast Asian struggles for independence from European colonialism.37 According to an Australian observer at this roundtable discussion, "considerable sympathy and admiration was expressed by delegates from various countries for the struggles for freedom now going on, particularly in Indonesia and Vietnam."38

As for the attitudes expressed at the Conference, the Thai delegation was reported to have "deliberately refrained from intervening in debate except twice to affirm their independent status."39 However, leaders from Malaya, Indonesia, and Burma called on their Asian colleagues to refrain from aiding in any way the colonial powers in their

32 'Asian Relations Conference: Representatives of Cambodia, Cochinchina, and Laos,' CRS A1068/1; M47/9/6/15, Part 2, AA.
34 'Press Communiqué, February 1947,' CRS A1068/1; M47/9/6/15, Part 3, AA.
37 Ibid., p. 1.
attempts to reoccupy their former colonies. While India and China never seriously entertained the thought of militarily involving themselves against the Europeans, the Vietnamese had nevertheless hoped that an Asian conference would tangibly back up their struggle against the French. DRV representatives pressed India to provide material assistance, to recognise their country diplomatically, and to take up their case at the UN. Together with Indonesia, Vietnam pressed the conference for concrete support of their independence movements against the French and Dutch, appealing for the creation of an organisation to aid Asian countries struggling for independence. When Nehru said that a Malayan suggestion calling for the creation of a Neutrality Bloc was a futile idea, a Vietnamese delegate retorted that a fighting federation would perhaps be more effective. As the DRV’s paper to the National Freedom Movements Committee bluntly put it: "We have used enough words about Asian unity. Now let us act."

Yet action on the part of large Asian nations was slow in coming. In reply to numerous requests for assistance against the Europeans from smaller Asian nations, Nehru said that such aid would "have the effect of enlarging the area of conflict" and the only form of aid he could envision was "moral support." Emphasising that political goodwill was not enough, the Vietnamese asked Nehru directly what he would do concerning French military operations in Vietnam. An Indonesian delegate agreed with his Vietnamese counterpart that sympathy was not enough when the Europeans could obtain arms. In an afternoon session, a Vietnamese delegate made a specific request for weapons from Nehru. Nehru responded that such a request could not be met and that India maintained friendly relations with France and could not supply arms or troops unless under UN auspices.

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40 'Australian Observers' Report,' p. 15.
42 Ton That Thien, op. cit., p. 124.
44 Quoted by Ton That Thien, op. cit., p. 123.
46 'Australian Observers' Report,' p. 16.
47 Australia, DEA, 'Australian High Commissioner, New Delhi, to External Affairs, I.6991,' 1 April 1947, CRS A1068; M47/9/6/15, Part 2, AA. Evelyn Colbert suggests two reasons for the Indian reluctance to support the DRV too openly. One was a fear of upsetting negotiations with the French over French enclaves in India, while the other was an unwillingness to risk a possible French veto in the UN over Indian claims in the Kashmir dispute. Colbert, op. cit., p. 620.
With one of the conference’s main goals of forming a Pan Asian Union undermined by competing Indian, Chinese, Soviet, and Australian interests, and an unwillingness on the part of India and China to aid independence movements effectively against the Dutch and French, several Southeast Asian leaders left New Delhi convinced that the only way a regional organisation could succeed was if it were a wholly Southeast Asian body. Vietnam and Indonesia were clearly the two countries most disillusioned by the failure of the Inter-Asian Conference. Before leaving New Delhi on 6 April 1947, the Vietnamese and Indonesian delegations expressed their displeasure by announcing a joint five-point plan against colonialism. In this statement, the DRV's representative from Bangkok, Dr. Trần Văn Luân, and one of Indonesia's delegates, Mr. Abu Hanifah, announced five points for joint action by Asian nations "to prevent colonialism from re-establishing its position as suppressor of Asian peoples." The points were:

Firstly, the Asian nations who are members of the UNO should put the question of colonial people in general, and of Vietnam in particular, on the agenda of the Security Council; secondly, Asian nations should recognise the Governments of Indonesia and of Vietnam; thirdly, Asian nations have to enforce the withdrawal of all foreign troops 'the cause of many miseries and troubles in Asia'; fourthly, Asian peoples and nations should not allow reinforcements of imperialist Powers in Vietnam, Indonesia, etc; fifthly, Asian nations and peoples should send medical aid, missions and volunteers to every battlefield where a struggle against imperialism is going on.

In an obvious signal to Nehru, the statement continued:

The appeasement policy and doubtful attitude of many big countries and neighbour countries have so far enhanced the danger of colonialism, as proved by the bitter experience of Vietnam. Actual support shall not enlarge or broaden the field of hostilities, as many people believed and feared.

Although this statement said the Conference symbolised a "good start," there could be no doubt in the minds of Southeast Asian leaders fighting the French and Dutch that the Inter-Asian Conference could do little more, effectively, than the UN.

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48 For evidence of the competing interests undermining a possible union, see: 'Australian Observers' Report,' p. 20 and Australia, DEA, 'Memorandum for Secretary of Department of External Affairs from Gerald Packer,' 24 April 1947, CRS A1068; M47/9/6/15, Part 2, AA.
49 'Five-Point Plan to End Colonialism: Call for Joint Action by Asian Nations,' Statesman [New Delhi], 6 April 1947.
50 Statesman, 6 April 1947 and Australia, DEA, 'Australian High Commissioner, New Delhi, to External Affairs,' 7 April 1947, CRS A1068; M47/9/6/15, Part 2, AA. See also: 'Proposal Made for Aiding Java, Vietnam Causes,' BP, 7 April 1947.
51 Statesman, 6 April 1947.
I.3. Plans for a Southeast Asia Organisation are Accelerated

Realising that they would get little tangible help from larger Asian nations, private conversations began among Southeast Asian representatives at the New Delhi conference concerning the importance of forming some sort of a federation of their own. Immediately following the conference, a number of Southeast Asian delegates stopped over in Rangoon at the invitation of Burmese leader U Aung San to discuss the formation of a Southeast Asian organisation and to begin a related effort to accelerate the normalisation of diplomatic relations among regional states. During a luncheon for the Thai delegation to the Inter-Asian Conference, Aung San announced that a goodwill mission would soon be dispatched to Bangkok to begin negotiations for the establishment of diplomatic relations. Aung San also told the Thai delegation in a speech before a record crowd on the Burmese New Year day that he favoured the formation of a Southeast Asian Union with members from Indonesia, Thailand, Indochina, and Malaya. Shortly thereafter, the Indonesian delegation to New Delhi, led by the Prime Minister Sutan Sjahrir, stopped over in Bangkok to meet with Thai officials and discuss the possibility of establishing diplomatic relations between the two nations. The Thais had thus far been non-committal towards recognising the Republic of Indonesia.

While the Thai government remained silent on the regional idea, numerous Thai newspapers began to call for more active leadership by Thailand in Southeast Asian affairs. Sharing this opinion, the president of the DRV's delegation in Bangkok, Nguyên Độc Quy, told the US Assistant Military Attaché in Bangkok that he felt Pridi was the "natural leader" of a Southeast Asia bloc with Thailand as its headquarters. It seems the ICP also backed this trend towards greater Southeast Asian solidarity. In a

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52 For evidence of this, see: 'Manifesto by Representatives of the Countries of South-East Asia League,' VNS, 29 September 1947; US, DOS, 892.00/5-2347, 'Fortnightly Summary of Political Events in Siam for the Period April 16-April 30, 1947,' 23 May 1947, USNA; 'Thatsana khong Chaw Wittam To Panha Kancattang Sahaphan Esia Akhene' [The Vietnamese View of the Problem of Establishing a Southeast Asian Federation], Mahachon [The Masses], 20 July 1947; and Interview with Trần Văn Giàu, 3 April 1989, Hồ Chí Minh City.

53 John C. Campbell et al., The United States in World Affairs, 1947-1948, (New York: Harper and Row, 1948), p. 236 and VNS, 29 September 1947. In early 1947, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Burma told an Australian diplomat that Burma's foreign policy was based on three main principles: 1) friendship with all countries; 2) loyal support of the UN; and 3) the strengthening of relations with other countries of Southeast Asia and the development of a Southeast Asian regional grouping. The Australian diplomat reported to Canberra that the Burmese Minister was closest to the idea of developing "a greater degree of unity in S.E. Asia." See: Australia, DEA, 'C.M. Despatch No. 6 to External Affairs from Australian Commissioner, Singapore,' 11 February 1947, CRS A4231/2; Singapore 47, AA.

54 US, DOS, 892.00/5-2347, 'Fortnightly Summary of Political Events in Siam for the Period April 16-April 30, 1947,' 23 May 1947, USNA.

55 US, DOS, 845C.9111 RR/4-1947, 'Secret Telegram from the Consul General at Rangoon (Packer) to the Secretary of State,' 19 April 1947 in FRUS (1947, Volume VI), p. 22. Again, it is unclear why the Philippines was omitted.

56 US, DOS, 892.00/4-2147, 'Summary of Political Events,' 21 April 1947, USNA, p. 3. 

57 Ibid., p. 3.
resolution passed by a plenum of Central Committee cadres in early April, the need to gain Southeast Asia's sympathy for the Vietnamese resistance was singled out.58

From the outset, Thai and Vietnamese officials in Bangkok were the major architects of what would become known as the Southeast Asia League. According to Trần Văn Giàu, the Vietnamese had discussed the need for a regional organisation with Pridi in Bangkok before the New Delhi conference.59 However, it was following the failure of the New Delhi conference to support Indonesia and Vietnam effectively, that Vietnamese representatives in Bangkok, most notably, Nguyễn Đức Quý, Trần Văn Giàu, Trần Văn Luan, and Lê Hy, began pressing the Thais to take the lead in forming a regional bloc. Whether or not the idea of a Southeast Asian regional organisation was initially Thai or Vietnamese in its conception is less important than the fact that the DRV representatives in Thailand pushed the notion hardest, with contributions coming from the Thais and other Southeast Asian representatives, though to a lesser degree.60 It was agreed that the aim of a regional organisation should be to unite the countries of Southeast Asia into one regional grouping of nations opposed to the return of European colonialism. The Atlantic Charter and the Charter of the United Nations were used as guiding models during these preliminary discussions.61 Moreover, because of Thailand's independent status and its favourable geographic position, it was increasingly seen as the natural headquarters of Southeast Asian regional organisation. The Thai paper, Suwannaphum, made this point in July 1947:

Southeast Asia is composed of small nations which, realising that they cannot help themselves, naturally seek to cooperate with each other some way or another. Siam, being situated in the centre of the group and the only independent country so far, naturally will be looked up to as an 'elder brother' nation.62

Despite the chauvinism, this statement was near the mark. The geographical factor was all the more obvious considering that Bangkok had become a meeting place for representatives from governments and nationalist groups from almost every country in

58 'Nghĩ Quyết Hội Nghị Cán Bộ Trung Ương, từ Ngày 3-4-1947' [Resolution of the Plenum of Central Committee Cadres, 3 April 1947], VKD, 1945-1950, p. 100.
59 Interview with Trần Văn Giàu; 3 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City.
60 In September 1980, immediately following the Vietnamese overthrow of the Pol Pot regime, the Vietnamese journal, NCLS, published a diplomatic memorandum (dated 26 August 1980) by the Socialist Republic of Vietnam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs discussing Thai-Vietnamese relations. In reviewing the history of Thai-Vietnamese relations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs maintained that "Pridi was the first person to put forward the idea of a Southeast Asia League (Lien Minh cac Nuoc Dong Nam A)." See: 'Thai Lan trong Quan He von Viet Nam, Lao, va Campuchia' [Thailand and its Relations with Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia], NCLS, No. 194, (10 September 1980), p. 4. Trần Văn Giàu said in an interview that the Southeast Asia League was his idea, while Nguyễn Đức Quý maintained that it was Pridi's.
61 For evidence of the influence of the Atlantic Charter and the UN, see: 'A Manifesto Issued by the "Southeast Asia Countries' Representatives,' VNS, 25 August 1947, p. 3, especially Articles 4-7.
62 Suwanaphum, 11 July 1947. In his memoir, Pridi cites the geographical location of Thailand as one of the reasons which led him to permit the Southeast League's headquarters to be based in Bangkok. See: Pridi, Chiwit, p. 89.
Southeast Asia. For instance, the 20,000-strong Indonesian community in Bangkok had established an Indonesian Independence League in 1946 to provide better information about the Indonesian revolution and to push for Thai recognition of the newly independent Indonesian government. By mid-1947, Burma and the Philippines joined Indonesia in discussing the establishment of diplomatic relations with Thailand. And, as we know, the DRV, Khmer Issarak, and Lao Issara all had representation in Bangkok by 1946. In Bangkok, these representatives could contact diplomats representing India, Burma, or Indonesia. As the President of the DRV delegation in Bangkok, Nguyễn Đức Quy, met Southeast Asian nationalists such as Indonesia’s Vice-President (under Sukarno), Mr. Hatta, and the Indonesian diplomatic representative, Dr. Soedarsono. In the meantime, DRV officials continued meeting with the Thais concerning a regional organisation. In June 1946, Phạm Ngọc Thạch reportedly met with Pridi in Bangkok concerning the importance of a forming a Southeast Asian regional grouping.

I.4. A French Counter Move: The Pan Southeast Asia Union

The Vietnamese need for the rapid formation of the League was made all the more urgent when the French publicly proposed in mid-1947 to establish their own regional organisation, the Pan Southeast Asia Union. Modelled on the recently formed Pan American Union in the Americas, Paris formulated this idea sometime in early 1947 as a means by which it could tackle a number of problems. Firstly, by denying admission to Hồ Chí Minh’s government, as well as to the governments-in-exile of the Khmer Issarak and Lao Issara, the French sought to isolate their opposition. Georges-Picot, one of the French officials in charge of the regional proposal, explained to an American diplomat, Abbot Low Moffat, the French motives for proposing the union. As Moffat wrote of the conversation:

Georges Picot expressed the view that the development of an organisation like the Pan American Union with its seat in Bangkok and first membership of Siam, Cambodia and Laos would go far to meet Siamese aspirations. Such an arrangement he thought also would be beneficial in French dealings with Vietnam by its significant omission of Vietnamese membership.
Secondly, the French proposal was designed to counter the growing sense of Southeast Asian unity which had emerged since the end of WWII and especially since the New Delhi conference. It seems likely that the considerable Asian support shown for the Vietnamese at the Conference and public announcements by Burma, Malaya, and India that they would help the Vietnamese, made the idea of an anti-colonial Southeast bloc a worrisome thought to the French, particularly when one considers the French inability to defeat the Vietnamese quickly in the battlefield and the DRV's ability to increase its links with the region through diplomatic representatives in Bangkok.67

Thirdly, besides worrying about Vietnam, the French were concerned by Thai historical claims on French Indochina. By raising the Pan Southeast Asia idea at a meeting of the Franco-Thai Conciliation Committee, a committee which had begun talks in April to consider Thai claims to territories in Laos and Cambodia, it was clear that Paris hoped to sidetrack Thai demands for a review of the Thai-French Indochina border.68 According to the French plan, the Pan Southeast Asia Union would initially consist of France, Thailand, and the French-backed governments of Laos and Cambodia. By offering Bangkok the main role in this union, Paris hoped to appeal to Bangkok's historic interests in these two countries without making any real territorial concessions on the Thai-Indochinese border.69 Later, it was envisioned, the union would be expanded to incorporate every Southeast Asian nation into the regional union which "would have a better chance of economic progress."70

According to a six page communique issued by the Thai government on the French proposal, Bangkok had dispatched Pridi Phanomyong as a special emissary to discuss this proposal with Picot in Washington in late April. In this meeting, Picot told Pridi that it was best to consider the French Pan Southeast Asia Union instead of border readjustments then under negotiation in the Conciliation Committee. Pridi said that the two issues were separate and insisted on the independence of Laos and Cambodia as a prerequisite for Thai participation in the French Pan Southeast Asia Union. When talks broke down over this matter, Pridi left Washington for further talks in Paris. However, the Quai d'Orsay was equally unwilling to compromise on Lao or Cambodian

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67 According to a US diplomatic observer, in February 1947 the French were increasingly worried about the "unrest stirred up in India, Burma, Ceylon and Singapore over Indochina and [the] threat to [their] line of communications." See: US, DOS, 851G.00/2-747, The Chargé in the United Kingdom (Gallman) to the Secretary of State, 7 February 1946 in FRUS (1947, Volume VI), p. 70.
68 'Nai Pridi Discussed Proposal,' BP, 1 July 1947.
69 See: US, DOS, 892.014/4-3047, 'French-Siamese Conciliation Commission,' 30 April 1947, USNA and 'Government Tells Background of Southeast Asian Union Talks,' BP, 7 July 1947. Geoffrey Gunn incorrectly states that the French Pan Southeast Asia Union was Pridi's idea. See: Gunn, op. cit., p. 175.
70 'Government Tells Background,' BP, 7 July 1947. According to this plan, France would represent Laos and Cambodia in the Union because they were French protectorates.
independence. Pridi returned to Thailand, where his refusal to participate in the French Southeast Asia union brought a sigh of relief from the Vietnamese.⁷¹

Pridi's rejection of the French proposal also won widespread praise from the Thai press. In a 6 July editorial, the Thai daily, Siam Nikon, wrote that to France

the union may serve as an outlet to its present difficulties in Indochina, where she has been trying in vain to regain her pre-war influence through force, with the result being that she is losing the economic benefits which she used to get from that country.⁷²

In an 8 July commentary in Thai Mai, one writer wrote that

the various countries in Southeast Asia should become independent before there could be any negotiations for the establishment of a Pan-Southeast Asia Union. . . It might also be possible that, in proposing the union, France is trying to make Bangkok a centre of communications between her and her dependencies with whom she is finding it extremely difficult to negotiate directly. In that case Siam will be in a very odd position, indeed, should she accept the proposal.⁷³

Suwannaphum, another Thai paper, published an editorial in which it said that the Union was possible on one condition: "The really important point is: 'Before such a union can be established, the countries to become its members must first have their independence.'"⁷⁴ The Thai daily, Si Krung, condemned the French proposal, pointing out:

The pan-Southeast Asia Union proposed by France is evidently to distract public attention from the frontier problem. . . . However, we must not forget that such a union can only be established between independent countries. We cannot help but praise Nai Pridi Phanomyong for his wit in encountering the French with this question to which they are at a loss to reply. If Siam cooperates with France in setting up the union, it will be tantamount to our joining another co-prosperity sphere on the same basis as the Japanese co-prosperity sphere in which our duty was to grow rice to feed the Japanese.⁷⁵

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⁷¹ For the details of Pridi's negotiations on the French proposal, see: 'Proposal Not Taken by France,' BP, 5 July 1947 and 'Government Tells Background of Southeast Asian Union Talks,' 7 July 1947 and Raingan Kanprachum Saphaphuthaen [Minutes of the Meetings of the House of Representatives], Khrang thi 30/2490 [1947], 30 August 1947, Vol. 2, pp. 2,738-39. For evidence that there was relief that the Thais didn't join the French, see: 'For a Free Union,' 7 July 1947 and 'Proposal Not Taken by France,' 5 July 1947.

⁷² Siam Nikon, 6 July 1947.

⁷³ Thai Mai, 8 July 1947.

⁷⁴ Suwannaphum, 11 July 1947.

⁷⁵ Si Krung, 11 July 1947.
Vietnam and the Southeast Asia League

Mahachon, a paper of the Thai Communist Party, execrated the French Southeast Asian plan, saying that it had to grant Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia independence before even suggesting such a union. In an article entitled Establishing a Southeast Asian Federation, a Vietnamese representative in Bangkok was asked to comment on the French Pan Southeast Asia Union. The Vietnamese writer explained that the French were not the originators of the Southeast Asia regional idea, rather it had been discussed during the Inter-Asian Conference in New Delhi by Vietnam, Burma, Thailand, Malaya, and Indonesia, all of which were "nations of Southeast Asia." A similar commentary by the Bangkok-based VNS called the French Pan Southeast Asia union "nonsense," asking what the French could do for Southeast Asia, not being of the region.

Part II. The Birth of the Southeast Asia League

II.1. Efforts towards a Union are Accelerated, July to September 1947

Following the French announcement of the French Pan Southeast Asia Union and in the wake of increased military action by both the French and Dutch in mid-1947, DRV, Lao Issara, and Khmer Issarak representatives and local residents from Indonesia, Malaya, and Burma in Bangkok began meeting to discuss concrete steps to establish an alternative regional organisation of their own. Leading this push for a Southeast Asian regional organisation were DRV diplomatic officials working in Bangkok. In a lengthy letter to the editor of the Bangkok Post on 7 July, one such delegate, Ngo Ha, stressed the need for a Southeast Asian regional organisation. It is worth quoting this letter in part to get a better idea of the Vietnamese thinking about Southeast Asian regionalism. As Ngo argued:

Geographically and ethnically, Southeast Asia has many similarities with Balkan Europe. That it may be a generator of prosperity, or of conflagration, depends on the degree of union of the native peoples. . . . Situated between China and India, the nations of Southeast Asia having common interests must be united to facilitate the solution to their internal problems, to support each other in the struggle for freedom, to safeguard their independence and thus, to contribute to world peace and prosperity. . . . Without a union, or a fighting union, how can we re-win and strengthen our right to be masters of our own land? Let us oppose our "united and free" to their "divide and rule". . . Southeast Asian countries are amongst the richest regions of the East with their rice,

76 'Kancattang Sahaphan Esia Akhene' [Establishing a Southeast Asia Federation], Mahachon, 20 July 1947. This Vietnamese spokesman was probably Lê Hy. Also see the editorial: 'Rop Wethi Kan Mun' [Political Struggle], Mahachon, 13 July 1947 and Suphot Dantrakun, Prasert Thrapsunthon, op. cit., p. 8.

77 The Establishment of the South East Asia Federation, VNS, 4 August 1947. This appears to be a longer version of the article which appeared in the previously cited Mahachon article.
quine, rubber, tin, oil and other precious minerals. United they will make themselves respected and prosperous; divided they have no hope but that of being dark slaves producing cheap raw materials and buying expensive manufactured products.78

Significantly, Ngo recognised that long-standing ethnic animosities might hamper the formation of such a union. Echoing what Dr. Hai had told Saipradit a year earlier, Ngo sought to allay such fears by insisting that Vietnamese nationalism "was not a narrow one" and stated that the Vietnamese did not make a distinction between imperialism, regardless of whether it "comes from the West or from the East." Lastly, he concluded that historical concerns over "minorities" and "hegemony" had to be overcome if the rich resources of the region were to lead to a regional organisation based on strength.79

On 12 July, an important meeting was held at the VNS during which the Vietnamese, Lao, and Cambodians pressed the Thais to take the lead in the formation of a Southeast Asian organisation. Addressing guests during this meeting (a number of whom were journalists), Trần Văn Giâu pointed out that the Vietnamese considered the French-sponsored Pan Southeast Asia Union to be a creation designed to isolate Vietnam from Laos and Cambodia. Giâu added that the French regional plan was unworkable unless it granted independence to its members, asking what business France had in forming such a union when she "cannot give economic help" and had failed to defend Vietnam's shores "because she could not defend her own borders" during WWII.80

During this meeting Vietnamese representatives released a six-point statement listing their position on the matter of Southeast Asian regionalism. Though it was written in poor English, it is worth reproducing parts of point six here:

In the fields of geography, history, econom[ics], culture as well as [in] political and military [matters] we feel Viet Nam is less bound to France than to her neighbours in South East Asia, [of which] indeed Siam is [at] the center, and the only country that maintains its independence. The reasons lie there, [as to] why we approve [of a leading role for] Siam in the establishment of the South East Asia Federation. Such [an] organization must be [based upon] the following line: no hegemony for any country [or] any people . . . [instead it should be] based on similar interests and common aspirations [sic].81

To the Vietnamese, there was no contradiction between membership in a Southeast Asian regional body and the French Union. DRV representatives made it clear during this

78 'Letter from Ngo Ha to the Editor of the Bangkok Post,' BP, 7 July 1947. It is unclear who "Ngo Ha" was. It may have been a pen name for any one of the DRV delegates working in Thailand.
79 Ibid.
80 'Siam's Neighbours Urge Sponsorship of Southeast Asia Union,' BP, 12 July 1947.
81 The Establishment of the South East Asia Federation,' VNS, 4 August 1947, p. 4. Statement number six.
meeting that if the French respected Vietnam's independence, "the establishment of [a] Southeast Asia Federation is not [in] the least in contradiction with the policy by which our Government [is] pledged to remain in the French Union."\(^82\)

But in the end, if a Southeast Asian regional organisation were to be formed, Thailand had to be willing to take the lead. As we have mentioned already, Thailand was the only safe place, independent, and located at the heart of the Southeast Asian region that could act as a headquarters. Moreover, the Vietnamese sought to take advantage of the sympathy and support which the Thais had shown for their independence movement thus far. In his address to this meeting, Giàu had Thailand's importance to the formation of a regional organisation firmly in mind when he concluded:

> The Pan Southeast Asia Union is [the] private property of Southeast Asia. Let us keep it so. Siam's leaders must sponsor this union.\(^83\)

Prince Souphanouvong and his Cambodian and Indonesian counterparts joined Giàu in calling on Thailand to take the first step. The Thai representative at this meeting, and also a delegate to the Inter Asian Conference, Manot Wutthitya, expressed his desire to see this happen.\(^84\) On 14 July, an editorial in the *Bangkok Post* joined in, asking why Thailand had not taken the lead as Giàu and Souphanouvong had urged. The *Post* pointed out that a regional organisation at this time did not have to be "a tightly cohesive federation" instead it could be a "regional body for the exchange of policies" on agriculture, communications or trade. This editorial said that "Siam should encourage it. Siam should accept the proffer of leadership that has been made."\(^85\) On the 17th, a letter to the *Post* from the DRV delegation lauded the *Post's* 14 July editorial, agreeing that "it is possible, nay, even necessary, to start at this time some form of organization which will enable us to have the way and lay down the foundation of our projected union."\(^86\)

Up to this point in time the Thais had done relatively little relating to the formation of a Southeast Asian regional body. In contrast to Vietnam and Indonesia, Bangkok had sent a low-level delegation to the Inter-Asian conference and had remained reluctant to recognise the Republic of Indonesia. A possible reason explaining Bangkok's reluctance to lead a Southeast Asian union was that the Thais would clearly have had more at risk in presiding over the formation of a bloc of Southeast Asian nations, based in Thailand, and hostile to the European colonial powers. Such a union could easily have been construed

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\(^82\) Ibid.


\(^84\) *Le Monde*, 15 July 1947. Souphanouvong said: "Siam is in the very heart of Southeast Asia. She must not remain in selfish isolation. Her neighbours look up to her to lead." See: *BP*, 12 July 1947.

\(^85\) *BP*, 14 July 1947.

\(^86\) *BP*, 17 July 1947.
as the making of an anti-European bloc. Alternatively, and perhaps a more likely possibility, is that the Thais were unwilling to push the idea of a regional organisation too quickly, for fear of undermining delicate negotiations with the French over Bangkok's claims to Indochinese territories. These talks had begun in April, as the New Delhi Conference was closing and as Vietnamese representatives based in Bangkok stepped up their calls for a truly regional organisation led by Thailand. Bangkok's slowness in responding to the regional idea may have been motivated by a desire to delay the formation of such a regional organisation until negotiations with the French had ended satisfactorily. As the Thais knew well from earlier experience, the French would have had no qualms about using Thai support of a Southeast Asian bloc as a pretext to suspend negotiations (see chapter 3).87

Conversely, the Vietnamese, already at war with the French, had little to lose and everything to gain through a regional union, a fact made all the more urgent by French attempts to hijack the Southeast Asian regional idea. Diplomatically, the Vietnamese needed the Thais much more than the Thais did the Vietnamese.

In mid-August, weeks before a Southeast Asian organisation was actually formed, Franco-Thai relations deteriorated dramatically following the decision made by the Conciliation Committee upholding French claims to the contested Lao and Cambodian territories. Since November 1946, when the Thais had agreed to return territories they had regained from the French during WWII, Bangkok seems to have held the genuine belief, backed by assurances from the Americans, that Paris would consider seriously Thai historical claims to certain parts of western Laos and Cambodia. The ruling in favour of the French appears to have left the Thais stunned.

A few excerpts from the Thai press leave no doubt as to the degree of Thai bitterness over the loss of their claims to the Indochinese territories. A commentator in Si Krung noted soberly that the "main reasons for our present loss of the four border provinces to France are 1) that we are a defeated nation and 2) we are weaker than France militarily."88 In what could have easily been a quote from Phibun or Wichit Wathakan in the late 1930s, this editorial concluded:

We can only make this affirmation: that Siam will get back every inch of her territories lost to France if the third World War comes and ends with the defeat of France and with Siam on the side of the victors. Otherwise, we cannot see any way whatsoever.89

87 Reuters quoted Pridi as saying during his visit to France in 1946 that Siam did not want to be "mixed up in the events in Indochina." See: BP, 7 January 1947.
88 Si Krung, 22 August 1947.
89 Ibid.
This tendency to look to other powers to support Thai interests, rather than taking up arms, pointed up trends in Thai foreign policy which became more pronounced in the post-WWII period, and which marked a major difference between Thai and Vietnamese external policies at the time. While the Vietnamese were busy fighting the French, a Thai editorial commented on Thailand's case against the French in the following terms:

It is useless that members of Parliament should argue and try to throw the responsibility on each other during the sessions of Parliament on the border issue on August 12 . . . As a matter of fact the honourable members would do better to get together and consult on what further step to be taken, for they knew well that it [regaining the lost territories] was a matter of trying to get back a sugar cane from the mouth of an elephant, and that no success could be expected even if angels were appointed to represent Siam at the negotiations.90

Hardly a coincidence, a Southeast Asian organisation was set up in Bangkok a few weeks after the breakdown in Franco-Thai border negotiations.

II.2. The Southeast Asia League is Formed, September 1947

On 2 September 1947, a gathering of Vietnamese in Bangkok celebrated the DRV's independence day, followed by an afternoon reception at the home of Nguyễn Đức Quy in Bangkapi. Attending this celebration were "Thai cabinet ministers, members of parliament, government officials, and other distinguished guests," including university lecturers and journalists. During an address to the guests, a message from Hồ Chí Minh was read.91 On the 6th, The Malaya Tribune published a lengthy editorial, entitled *South East Asian Bloc*, in which it argued for the creation of a regional organisation:

The Southeast Asia bloc could include Burma, Siam, Indo China, Malaya and Indonesia. . . The danger to Southeast Asia may not be apparent just yet. But with its tremendous potential and great riches, it would tempt the powerful. It behoves the leaders of Southeast Asia to call a conference at the earliest possible moment to draft a long-term plan which will enable this part of the world to stave off any threat, political or economic, that might arise in the future.92

Two days later, on 8 September 1947, 60 persons met at the Ratanakosin Hotel in Bangkok to inaugurate the Southeast Asia League.93 This was followed by a standing-

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90 *Chat Thai*, 17 August 1947,
91 *Prachakon*, 4 September 1947 and *Vietnam Observes Independence Day*, *BP*, 2 September 1947,
[The Banner in the Tree reads: "The Southeast Asia League"]

Thailand  Cambodia  Indonesia  Malay  Unclear  Laos  Vietnam
room only public opening at the Thai Fine Arts Theatre.\textsuperscript{94} Representatives from Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Thailand and Malaya were present. For reasons still unknown, Burmese and Filipino delegates did not attend the founding meeting, although slots were held open for each. As we shall see, the Vietnamese, Lao Issara, Khmer Issarak, and the Thais assigned ranking officials to the body, while the Indonesians, Burmese, and Malayans were only represented by unimportant civilians residing in Bangkok. According to Article 8 of the Southeast Asia League's constitution, the official founding members were: Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Burma, Malaya, Indonesia, and the Philippines.\textsuperscript{95} Pridi allowed the League to be based in Bangkok and provided initial start-up funds.\textsuperscript{96}

To mark the formation of the Southeast Asia League, \textit{Mahachon} published a front page drawing showing a tree, entitled the Southeast Asia League, being tended to by the members of the organisation, depicted as the gardeners of this "Southeast Asian" tree (see picture on previous page). Tapping into the spirit of the United Nations, the League's emblem was a picture of the globe, supported by two hands, with the focus on Southeast Asia.

In the beginning, the Southeast Asia League was an unofficial, provisional body which was designed to give way eventually to a "lasting and effective official organization known as the South East Asia Federation."\textsuperscript{97} Writing decades later, Pridi said that at its inception the League was neither a "federation" nor a "confederation" because each member state maintained full control over their internal and external affairs. Instead, Pridi wrote that this organisation was more of an "entente cordiale" between member states, providing for mutual assistance and opposition to European colonialism.\textsuperscript{98} But until the League was officially recognised by the national governments of Southeast Asia, it remained a non-binding organisation. In fact, upon its establishment, the League was not accorded official recognition by any Southeast Asian government. As its manifesto read, the primary goal of the Southeast Asia League was

\begin{quote}
the achievement of a unity among the various peoples of South East Asia which will eventually be of such tangible and substantial nature that official recognition will be
\end{quote}

\begin{tabular}{l}
\textsuperscript{94} GB, PRO, F.O. 371/69686 XC/A 55667, 'The Southeast Asia League,' 12 January 1947. \\
\textsuperscript{95} Constitution of the South East Asia League (S.E.A.L.),' (Bangkok: 8 September 1947), p. 8 and 'South East Asia League Formed,' \textit{BP}, 9 September 1947, pp. 18-19. I would like to thank Dr. Robert Cribb for providing me with a copy of the League's constitution. \\
\textsuperscript{96} \textit{Chiwit}, p. 89. \\
\textsuperscript{97} 'Constitution of the South East Asia League,' p. 6. \\
\textsuperscript{98} \textit{Chiwit}, p. 89 and 'South East Asia League Formed,' \textit{BP}, 9 September 1947, pp. 18-9. It appears that Pridi used the French word "entente cordiale" in his original memoir, which was written in French, for the \textit{BP} uses the French word in its English translation. It also appears that Pridi used the French words, "Fédération" and "Confédération," in the original French version, for these two words are included as footnotes in the Thai translation. I feel the Thai version has incorrectly translated "Fédération" as "Sahaphap," "Sahaphap" is closer in meaning to "Union," whereas "Sahaphan" would be a more accurate translation for "Fédération."
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accorded it by [the] organization of a *Federation of South East Asia*, which materializes the union of the various governments and peoples of the area.99

Despite its unofficial status, the formation of the League did point up new currents of thinking flowing through the region. The opening paragraph of the League's constitution captures, with striking perceptiveness, the extent of world-wide changes underway after WWII:

> With the achievements of modern science, the countries of the world are each day being drawn closer and closer together. Modern means of transport have completely annihilated the old conceptions of time and space so that the world is fast moving toward the visionary's ideal of one community... [T]he peoples of South East Asia are convinced that their freedom, their well-being and their security will be more effectively assured by uniting their efforts for the achievement of their common ideals and aspirations.100

The specific goals of the League were as follows: 1) the promotion and the development of good understanding and fraternal relations between the peoples of Southeast Asia; 2) the realisation of the genuine aspirations to full nationhood of the peoples of Southeast Asia and the raising of the economic, social and cultural standards of the peoples of Southeast Asia; 3) the promotion of universal peace, respect for human rights, and the implementation of principles set forth by the charter of the UN; 4) the promotion of study, research and interchange of information on Southeast Asia; 5) the publication and distribution of matters of cultural, social, economic, and scientific interests relating to Southeast Asia; and 6) the establishment of a *South East Asia Federation*.101

The League was made up of a Central Executive Committee (CEC), which would hold Extraordinary General Meetings and Central Executive Meetings. The CEC consisted of fifteen members, with seven specific positions reserved for the President, Vice-President, General Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Treasurer, Librarian, and Public Relations officer. These seven formed a sub-group of the CEC known as the Permanent Committee (PC). Leaders were elected to these positions at a General Meeting irrespective of nationality. The remaining eight positions on the CEC were filled by a representative from each of the eight Southeast Asian member countries.

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99 'Manifesto of the Southeast Asia League,' 8 September 1947. This manifesto was signed by Manot Wuthittyia and Snoh Tanbunyuen (Thailand); Lê Hy (Vietnam); Prince Souphanouvong (Laos); Ta Ta S. Bhonsat (Cambodia); Aswi Marmo (Indonesia); U. Hua La Pee (Burma); and Marmud Noeh (Malaya).

100 'Foreword of the Constitution of the South East Asia League,' p. 2.

101 'Constitution of the South East Asia League,' pp. 7-8. Italics in the original. For a comparison of Southeast Asian regionalism between the end of WWII and the arrival of the Cold War to Southeast Asia and the period during the demise of the Cold War in 1989-90, see: Christopher E. Goscha, 'Could Indochina Join ASEAN?' *Bangkok Post*, 24 November 1990.
The President of the Central Executive Committee of the League was an associate of Pridi and one of the chief Thai negotiators during the recent Franco-Thai border negotiations, Tiang Serikhan. The Vice-President was Trần Văn Giàu. Lê Hy was the Treasurer and Prince Souphanouvong was the General Secretary. Manot Wuthithya was Assistant Secretary and Sukit Nikhamein was the Librarian. Thawi Udon, the manager of Thai Industrial Development Co. and a member of the House of Elders, was Public Relations Officer. Other CEC members included: Dr. Trần Văn Luän, Prince Narodhom (Cambodia), Prince Suvannaphouma (Laos), Aswis Marmo (Indonesia), M.H. Noeh (Malaya), and Dusit Boontham, a Thai member of Parliament.102 For still unknown reasons, there was no representative from the Philippines on the CEC. The Thai members—Tiang Serikhan, Thawi Udon, Dusit Buntham and Sukit Nikhamein—were prominent leaders in Pridi's Sahachip (Cooperative) Party and most, as we have shown, had long been in touch with Vietnamese resistance leaders.103

Thai-Vietnamese domination of the CEC was obvious, symbolised by the election of a Thai as President and a Vietnamese as the Vice-President. A document from the British Foreign Office, citing Manot Wuthithya as its source, reports that it had been agreed before 8 September by the Organising Committee (OC) that a Thai would be president and a Vietnamese national would be the vice-president.104 The OC was said to have been unanimous that Nguyễn Đức Quy would be the CEC's nomination for Vice-president. However, at the time of the inaugural meeting on the 8th, Quy was not in Bangkok and Lê Hy had already been elected secretary of the CEC. According to this source, the only other Vietnamese official present was Trần Văn Giàu, leaving the OC with no other choice but to elect Giàu vice-president even though delegates did not want a "prominent communist" on its board.105 Despite these problems, Thai-Vietnamese dominance remained intact, underscored by the fact that the mailing address for the League was 543 Silom Road, the premises of the VNS in Bangkok.106

102 Ibid., p. 17. The members of the Organising Committee of the League, the group which actually made the League a reality, included: 1) Thailand: Manot Wuthithya and Snoh Tanbunyuen; 2) Vietnam: Lê Hy; 3) Laos: Prince Souphanouvong; 4) Cambodia: Ta Ta Rafatipoves; 5) Indonesia: Aswi Marmo; 6) Burma: U Hua La Pee; 7) Malaya: Marmud Noeh. Five members of the OC were on the CEC. See: Ibid., p. 17.

103 US, DOS, 892.00/9-2347, 'Fortnightly Summary of Political Events in Siam for the Period September 1-September 15, 1947,' 23 September 1947, USNA.

104 According to John Coast, it was felt that a strong president was needed from among Pridi associates to make it more effective and hopefully make it easier for the League to gain "real support" from the Thai government. The League's architects looked toward some kind of open recognition or official authorisation to collect funds to promote the League. For these reasons, Tiang Serikhan was selected. Although some doubted his integrity, they were comforted by the fact that they could vote him out of power at the end of the year, by which time they hoped to have official recognition. See: GB, PRO, F.O. 371/69686 XC/A 55667, John Coast, 'The South-East Asia League,' 12 January 1948.

105 Interview with Nguyễn Đức Quy, 5 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City; GB, PRO, F.O. 371/69686 XC/A 55667, 'Note on the Election of Tran Van Giau.'

106 The Indonesian Independence League was also reported to have had its mailing address at the VNS. See: Australia, DEA, 'Letter from Eastman to Francis Stuart, Australian Commissioner, Singapore,' 6 July 1948, CRS A1838/2; 466/1/1, Part I, AA.
Moreover, because the Indonesians, Malayans, and Burmese were unwilling to take a prominent role in the League, leadership tended to reside even more in the hands of the Thais and Vietnamese. The Indonesian representative in the League, Aswis Marmo, was only a student living in Bangkok who soon left the country. The Malayan and Burmese representatives were also relatively unimportant residents in Bangkok. This was in marked contrast to the considerably higher ranking officials selected by the Thais, Vietnamese, Lao, and Cambodians. Tieng Serikhan was a member of parliament, a former Deputy Minister of the Interior, and a wartime leader of the Seri Thai. Prince Souphanouvong was the Lao Minister of Foreign Affairs, while the Cambodian, Ta Ta Rafatipvongse, was a Deputy Prime Minister of the Khmer Issarak.

A possible reason explaining the low-profile taken by the Indonesians, Burmese, Malayans was the fear that by participating in the League relations with the Dutch and British would be exacerbated at a time when these nations were engaged in tense negotiations to gain their independence. The Indonesians were careful not to give the Dutch grounds for alleging the Indonesian resistance was communist tainted. The ill-advised appointment of Trần Văn Giàu, a Vietnamese leader known by western intelligence to have studied in Moscow and to be a communist, did little to allay Indonesian fears of possible western calumination of the League and its members. During a visit by Indonesian officials to Bangkok in late 1947, the Indonesians reportedly made every effort to avoid contact with the Vietnamese. According to John Coast, this was "bluntly explained to the Vietnamese as being Indonesian determination not to give the Dutch even the faintest chance of labelling them Communists." However, it must be noted that on 21 November the Bangkok Post quoted Dr. Soedarsono, an Indonesian envoy visiting Bangkok, as saying that the "Indonesian Republic will certainly give the League support."

II.3. The Wider Aims of the League

In forming the League, Southeast Asian leaders also envisioned the wider goal of creating an economic bloc. Having been subjected to European colonialism for decades, Southeast Asians sought to tap the wealth of the region for their own benefit. Burma's independence leader, U Aung San, had made this point clear earlier in the year when he told a Thai delegation in Rangoon that one of the League's important goals would be the promotion of regional "economic solidarity." Indeed, the opening sentence of the

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108 Ibid. According to Coast, the Vietnamese delegation in Bangkok recognised this problem and informed the DRV of the need to recall Trần Văn Giàu. Giàu remained in Thailand well into 1948.
League's manifesto confirmed this, recognising that "South East Asia is one of the richest areas of natural resources in the world." The manifesto went on to state that the League symbolised "an increasing sentiment among countries of South East Asia to join in an effort towards a regional development of common interests." During its opening meeting on 8 September, the League targeted the need for economic recovery in Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Indonesia, Burma, the Philippines, and Thailand. An Associated Press correspondent reported from Bangkok that in the long term the founders of the League hoped to coordinate the economic life of the region so as to "avoid conflict and competition between the often non-complementary economies of the member states."

It also merits mention that the Southeast Asia League did not include China or India. Pridi wrote in his memoir that the exclusion of these two Asian powers was not an oversight, but rather it was quite intentional. Describing the meetings he had with Southeast Asian nationalists leaders concerning the formation of the League after WWII, Pridi said that even though it was clear each country would have to gain its independence, we would still have had to confront the two giants: Nationalist China, which had emerged victorious after the defeat of the Japanese, and India, which had recently won its independence from Britain. Therefore, in the event that each country and people in this region [Southeast Asia] were to gain their independence in an isolated fashion, then it would be difficult for each to protect itself in the event of an invasion by these two giants.

It seems that as Southeast Asian leaders took a stand against the return of European colonialism, they simultaneously had their eyes focused on a post-colonial future, one in which they would like to prevent neighbouring, larger Asian powers from replacing the dominant positions left by the Europeans.

Possibly reading more into the League than it merited at the time, Pridi wrote in his memoir much later that the League had the long-term goals of mutual assistance and defence. However, a November 1947 report by the AP's Stanley Swinton seems to support Pridi's assertion, listing as one of the long-range goals of the League the "control

111 'Manifesto of the South East Asia League,' 8 September 1947.
112 'Samibat Esia Akhene' [The Southeast Asia League], Mahachon, 14 September 1947. It is unclear why Malaya was not mentioned.
113 'Southeast Asia League,' BP, 22 November 1947.
114 Chiwit, pp. 88-89.
115 Ibid., p. 89. In his memoir, published in 1974, Pridi refers to the League as the the "Southeast Asian Association of Nations." It is clear that he is referring to the Southeast Asia League, and it appears that by using the word "association" instead of "league," Pridi might have been trying to take credit for the idea of the Association of Southeast Asian States (ASEAN), which had been formed during the late 1960s. He mentions ASEAN when bringing up the topic of the League in his memoir.
and organisation of regional defense." Whether this was actually targeted at the outset by the League or merely mentioned as a long-term possibility remains unclear.

II.4. The Short Life-span of the Southeast Asia League

Following the Conciliation Committee’s decision against Bangkok’s border case in August, Thai officials began to voice publicly their support of Southeast Asian independence movements. In mid-September, the Thai Foreign Minister, Luang Arthkit, declared in a speech to the General Assembly of the UN that Thailand fully supported the Indonesian independence struggle against the Dutch. In a letter to Prime Minister Thomrong, the League praised this action as a "milestone along the road to the establishment of the Southeast Asia Federation." The League also thanked the Thais for their support of "Indonesian freedom." This letter also lauded Pridi’s earlier insistence that Laos and Cambodia be granted their independence before joining a French-backed union. In language that appears to be designed intentionally by the League to prod the Thais to the forefront, this letter said that Thailand had shown "a deep sympathy with her less favored neighbors, and has rightly taken the position of leadership in representing those voiceless millions."

On 23 September, Direk Chaiyanam, the former Thai Foreign Minister and now the Ambassador to Great Britain, made a speech supporting the Vietnamese independence movement at a gathering in New York celebrating the second anniversary of the birth of the DRV. On the 29th, another letter was sent by the League to the Thai delegation at the UN thanking the Thais for their "sympathy towards South East Asia freedom movements." And in a letter to the editor of the Post, the general secretary of the Southeast Asia League had Thailand in mind when he wrote: "It is now no longer possible for other countries, particularly neighbouring countries of Vietnam, to overlook the far-reaching consequences of this war [in Vietnam]."

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119 VNS, 14 October 1947.
120 BP, 25 September 1947.
121 Ibid.
122 ‘Second Anniversary of the Viet Nam Republic Observed in the United States,’ VNS, 29 September 1947. Also attending this celebration in support of the Vietnamese were such well-known figures as Pearl S. Buck, Harold Isaacs, editor of Newsweek, and a number of other Asian representatives from the UN and a former OSS agent who had worked with the Vietnamese during the war.
123 ‘South East Asia League Supports Siamese U.N.O. Delegation,’ VNS, 5 November 1947. This letter was signed by Prince Souphanouvong.
It remains unclear whether the Southeast Asia League as an organisation actually provided any military aid to the Indonesian or Indochinese independence movements. One reason possibly explaining why the League may not have given military assistance was its short life-span. Another possibility is that if the League had openly provided military support to the Indochinese and Indonesians, then it would have implied a Southeast Asian military alliance in opposition to the French, Dutch, and, to a lesser degree, the British and Americans. With open conflicts underway in Indochina and Indonesia in 1947, it is possible that Thailand, Burma, the Philippines or Malaya could or would not run the risk of openly involving themselves, militarily, against the Europeans by providing weapons or "volunteer forces" while in the process of consolidating their own independence. On the effectiveness of the Southeast Asia League, Trần Văn Giàu said that it "was a political organisation and not a military one," but he also concluded that "as for military matters, Thailand was already aiding us." This was certainly true (see chapters 3, 4, and 6).

II.5. The Fall of the League and the Onset of the Cold War, 1948

Before Pridi was ousted from power in a November 1947 military coup, the League attempted to convene a special meeting of the Southeast Asia League to discuss foreign policy matters and the changing regional and international situation. The Indonesian and Burmese representatives in Bangkok, as well as leaders of the resistance governments from Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, were ready to meet when the November coup took place. The meeting was never held and the future of the Southeast Asia League was cast into doubt as Pridi went into hiding and Phibun Songkhram, backed by increasingly powerful military and police officials, began his return to power.

The Vietnamese were clearly worried by this development. On 10 February 1948, General Nguyễn Bình, commander-in-chief of Vietnamese forces in Nam Bồ, personally wrote a letter in French to Phibun. In this letter, Bình sent Phibun his "congratulations and best wishes for the realisation of your noble aim—the prosperity of the Siamese people and the defence of Siamese national integrity against foreign aggression." One

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125 While I have no direct evidence to support this possibility, Indonesian leader, Dr. Sutan Sjahrir, backed the idea of a Southeast Asian regional body, but qualified it by saying that "I do not use the term 'bloc' as this suggests an idea of power conflict. What I mean by regional organisation is simply an effort from Asia toward a world order." See: 'Southeast Asia Union' [Editorial], BP, 7 May 1948.

126 Interview with Trần Văn Giàu, 3 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City.

127 Interview with Nguyễn Đức Quy, 5 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City and Stanley Swinton (AP), 'Southeast Asia League,' BP, 22 November 1947.

128 'Vietnam General Urges Southeast Asia Unity,' BP, 20 February 1947. Nguyễn Bình also sent a message to the overseas Vietnamese in Thailand in which he and the President of the National Union of Vietnam praised the overseas Vietnamese support of the DRV. See: 'Viet Nam Leaders Send Greetings to Viet Nam Nationals in Siam,' VNS, 3 March 1948. At the same time, Nguyễn Bình also sent a letter to Pandit Nehru. See: 'Letter to Pandit Nehru from General Nguyen Binh,' 8 March 1948, VNS.
of the ways Binh said this could be done more effectively was through closer ties between Vietnam and "Siam and all South-East Asian countries." As Binh told Phibun:

> In the Southeast Asia bloc, the geographic situation and the historical bonds between our two peoples require that Siam and Vietnam be closer united. If we maintain stronger relationships between our two countries and tighten the friendly ties between ourselves, and every other people of Southeast Asia, we can defeat all manoeuvres of aggression by foreigners.\(^{129}\)

On 23 April, a letter from the Acting President of Vietnam's delegation in Bangkok, Lê Hy, to Phibun was published in the *Bangkok Post*. Hy sent best wishes to Phibun on behalf of the "Government and the people of Vietnam."\(^{130}\) Continuing, Hy said:

> Vietnam as a neighboring country has every desire to see political and economic stability brought about in Siam, and it is felt that under your leadership this goal will be achieved. I take this opportunity of reaffirming the feelings of sincere friendship of the Vietnam government and the Vietnam people and of the loyalty of Vietnam nationals resident in Siam towards the Siamese government.\(^{131}\)

On 27 April, Phibun answered Lê Hy in a letter sent to the Vietnamese Delegation in Bangkok. Phibun's response:

> ... [I]t gives me great pleasure to feel that Vietnam desires to see political and economic stability brought about in Siam ... I avail myself of this opportunity to wish Viet Nam speedy success in her struggle for independence and full nationhood.\(^{132}\)

But Phibun's sympathy did not last for long. Political changes in Bangkok and the emergence of the Cold War in the region soon altered Phibun's view of the Vietnamese independence struggle, as we shall see in the next chapter. In 1948, Thai critics of Pridi, individuals often more concerned with their own political ambitions than with accuracy, pointed to the League as evidence of a communist plan to infiltrate Southeast Asia. Writing in 1950, Luang Kat Songkhram, one of the chief planners of the November 1947 military *coup*, included the military's fear of a Southeast Asian communist union among the listed reasons for the *coup*. Under item thirteen, Kat confuses, perhaps intentionally, the League and the French Pan Southeast Asia Union:

129 BP, 20 February 1947. DRV officials must have channelled this letter to MacDonald at the BP in a deliberate move to make it public, and thereby demonstrate Vietnam's good intentions in a public forum as well as to play off Phibun's anti-French sentiments in a move to gain his support of their considerable resistance activities in Thailand. Considering the wide-range of Vietnamese activities in Thailand, Phibun was almost certainly aware the importance of Thailand to Vietnam.

130 For a copy of this letter, see: 'Message from Vietnam Delegation to Premier Phibun Songkhram,' VNS, 23 April 1947 or BP, 24 April 1947.

131 'Message from Vietnam Delegation to Premier Phibun Songkhram,' VNS, 23 April 1947.

132 TNA, fl.1. 0201.37.6, 'Phibun to Vietnamese Government Delegation,' 27 April 1948.
13. Excessive Red Ideology. The powerful have gone and allowed Thailand to become a member of the Southeast Asia Union together with Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, all of which are French colonies.\textsuperscript{133}

Kat and others pointed to Pridi's leftist views and his leading role in the League as evidence of growing Soviet influence in Southeast Asia.\textsuperscript{134} Pridi rebutted these accusations, asking how the League could be a communist machination when it included members of the Lao Royal family. But the charges continued, spurred on by western diplomats, journalists, and the distortions created by the Cold War.\textsuperscript{135}

While it is certainly true that Pridi held leftist ideas throughout his political career, it does not follow that he would necessarily bow to Moscow at the expense of the region's own interests. From the evidence available, the allegations that Moscow somehow exercised influence within the League or over Pridi in 1947 and 1948 are hard to support. John Coast, a balanced source and a correspondent who had close contacts with some of the members of the League, wrote that the Southeast Asia League is first local in character, then international. It is a defensive organisation. It is definitely not now, or in its beginning, under any Communist influence. Where it may end up will largely depend on the colonial policies followed by Russia, America, and ourselves [Great Britain]. At the moment, both Indonesians and Viet-Namese will say to you: 'Anyone that helps us is our friend. So far the Russians have done absolutely nothing to assist us either at the United Nations or in any other sphere.'\textsuperscript{136}

Immediately following WWII, Moscow had very little influence in Southeast Asia, refusing to recognise both Thailand and the DRV, for fear of upsetting its relationship


\textsuperscript{134} Chiwit, p. 90.

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., p. 90. In 1947, US officials considered the League to be a nationalist, anticolonial organisation. However, as the Cold War made its way in the region things began to change. In a confidential March 1948 State Department memo on the "Possible Formation of a Bloc of Eastern Peoples," the League was singled out by ranking US policy-makers as a symbol of Soviet designs in the region. As one official bluntly wrote, "Representatives from the various countries of Southeast Asia have established a Southeast Asia League, which is a Communist organization, at Bangkok." US, DOS, 'Possible Formation of Bloc of Eastern Peoples,' RG 59, Southeast Asia 1950, Communism, Box 5, USNA.

with France. In fact, although Moscow recognised the Phibun government in 1948, it would take two more years before establishing diplomatic relations with Hồ Chí Minh's government. And, with similar national interests in mind, India, Indonesia, and Thailand were also very cautious in joining the DRV in anticolonial regional organisation. In the end, while there may have been vague notions of "Southeast Asian-ness" after WWII, the evidence suggests that the Southeast Asia League meant the most to the Vietnamese. With war underway with the French, DRV officials working in Bangkok saw Southeast Asian regionalism as a further means by which they could counter the French. They had little to lose and everything to gain.
Chapter 6

The Western Front and its Demise, 1947-1949

While DRV representatives in Thailand were working in 1947 to counter the French diplomatically, they simultaneously continued to strengthen their military activities from Thailand. In this, our final chapter, we will show that following the outbreak of full-scale war in Indochina in December 1946 until the Chinese Communist victory in 1949, Thailand continued to hold a unique position in the Vietnamese resistance against the French. During this period, it served as a key source of arms, equipment, and medicines, as well as a rear area for military training and recruiting of young overseas Vietnamese. The first part of this chapter demonstrates how conditions in Thailand were most favourable for the administration of these activities during the period prior to the November 1947 coup in Bangkok. In the second part of this chapter, we will show that although resistance programmes continued into the post coup period, Phibun's return to power changed the terms guiding Vietnamese resistance activities in Thailand, forcing the ICP to make changes in the the administration of their operations in Thailand in 1948. With the French on the move in Indochina and the victory of the Chinese Communists still over a year away, access to Thailand remained an important priority. However, in the end, these changes had little time to take effect. In 1949, Thailand's importance came to an abrupt end as the victory of the Chinese Communists opened more important northern bases and provided the Vietnamese with large-scale Chinese aid. Further detracting from Thailand's value to the Vietnamese by 1949 was Phibun's increasingly stringent crack-down on Vietnamese activities in Thailand.

Part I: Thailand and the Outbreak of War in Indochina

I.1. The Formation of the Western Front

Shortly after the outbreak of full-scale war in Indochina in December 1946, a meeting of the Overseas Vietnamese General Association was held in Udon. Attending this meeting were ICP representatives in Thailand and delegates sent from Vietnam, including a ranking communist, Cao Hồng Lãnh. During this meeting, Hồ Chí Minh's call for nation-wide resistance was studied and ways were discussed to implement it among the
overseas Vietnamese in Thailand and western Indochina. At the same time (or possibly during this same meeting), the ICP Central Committee directed its Overseas Party branch in Thailand to begin assisting the Lao and Cambodian resistance movements from the west, meaning from bases in Thailand and western Indochina.\(^{2}\) One of the first concrete results of this directive was the formation in early 1947 of the Western Front Military Committee (\(\text{Ứy Ban Quản Sự Mật Trận Miền Tây}\)) by Vietnamese cadres working from Thailand. Vũ Hữu Bình was in charge of the committee's military affairs, while Trần Văn Giäu and Lê Hữu Quân tended to political matters. Vietnamese officials, referred to only as Xô, Khanh, and Cung by Hoan, were also said to be members.\(^{3}\)

A special military zone in western Indochina, known simply as the Western Front (\(\text{Mật Trận Miền Tây}\)), was soon established under the supervision of the Western Front Military Committee. This zone ran along both sides of the Mekong River from upper Laos south to northwestern Cambodia. It was part of the overall Viet Minh military command structure, linked to the other war zones into which Vietnam had been partitioned. Sub-divided into five smaller sub-zones, the Western Front was under the joint direction of the ICP's Overseas Vietnamese Special Committee in Udon and the DRV delegation in Bangkok, although the degree of coordination between these two was problematic as we shall see.\(^{4}\)

The survival of the Western Front was dependent upon continued Vietnamese access to Thailand. As a part of the Front's operations, military training camps were set up in northeastern Thailand to train overseas Vietnamese recruits and, to a lesser degree, Lao and Cambodian fighters. Some of the Front's main covert training camps were in the forests of Ubon Ratchathani.\(^{5}\) Arms production teams and weapons repair facilities were also formed in secret locations in northeast Thailand and western Indochina. Not surprisingly, the overseas Vietnamese played an important role in financing and

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\(^{1}\) Son Tùng, op. cit., pp. 167-68 and CVDCQ, p. 68. Quỳnh Anh and Ba Dốc are known members of the Overseas Vietnamese Party Branch in Thailand at this time. While one can only speculate, it seems likely that other members included: Vũ Hữu Bình, Mai Văn Quang, Nguyễn Văn Xô, Nguyễn Chân, Lê Mạnh Trinh, and Trần Déc Vinh among others.

\(^{2}\) Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 305. Of the twelve points listed in the 22 December "Resistance Programme," point four called for "linking up with the Cambodians and Lao." See: Lịch Sử Quân Đội Nhân Dân, p. 254.

\(^{3}\) Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 305. Xô may be a reference to Nguyễn Văn Xô, who was a member of the ICP Lao Regional Committee and a representative of the Party branch at the Macao Congress in 1935. Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., pp. 72 and T.C., 'Nhìn Lại ... op. cit., p. 24. Trần Văn Đinh also referred to a certain Nguyễn Văn Xô as a colleague of Mai Văn Quang. Interview with Trần Văn Đinh, 20 June 1990, Washington, DC. French intelligence refers to a certain Dinh Văn Khánh as the head of the Vietnamese resistance organisation in Udon. See: Haut Commissariat de France pour L'Indochine, Bureau Federal de Documentation, Etude des Activités V.M. (pour la period du 15 au 31 Oct 1948), Saigon 8 Nov. 1948.

\(^{4}\) Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 305. Lê Mạnh Trinh also mentions the active role of the Overseas Vietnamese Special Committee (Độc ủy Việt Kiều) in Vietnamese activities in Thailand during this time. See: CVDCQ, p. 67 as well as chapter 2 of this thesis. Two known members of this highly secret but powerful committee were a certain Khánh and Bình, almost certainly Vũ Hữu Bình and possibly Dinh Văn Khánh. Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 297.

\(^{5}\) Interview with Nguyễn Đức Quy, 5 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City.
supporting the activities of the Western Front. Following the outbreak of war in Indochina, Hoan says "several thousand" overseas Vietnamese youths volunteered for military service to fight the French on battlefields of Indochina. In addition, the Vietnamese in the region donated "several million bac" (Vietnamese for units of money, probably referring either to bahts or piastres) to the resistance, of which a large amount was reportedly allocated to the Western Front.6 Even a Soldier Recovery Station of the Western Front was set up in Ubon Ratchathani province under the supervision of Quynh Anh.7 Close to the battlefields of Indochina, but largely safe from the threat of direct French military interference, "Thailand became the rear guard for the "Western Front.""8

I.2. Thailand as a Source of Military Assistance

The effectiveness of the Western Front was strengthened significantly by continued, secret Thai military assistance to the Vietnamese after the outbreak of war. Thai government and military officials made available boats, trains, and were even ready to lease DRV adherents airplanes to transport weapons from Thailand back to Indochina. The Thai Navy allocated boats to the Vietnamese to take weapons, ammunition, equipment, and medicines procured in Thailand back to points in southern Vietnam and Cambodia. Oftentimes military hardware was loaded onto Viet Minh vessels in the port of Bangkok and clandestinely shipped out by night to avoid detection by French spies. From there, specially appointed cadres guided the vessels along designated sea routes (see chapter 4). Between Thailand and Nam Bồ, these boats stopped over at hidden check-points on the islands of Koh Chang, Koh Kut, and Phu Quoc. The boats then made their way to destinations in southwestern Nam Bồ and Cambodia where they were met by specially appointed resistance agents who unloaded the arms and distributed them to military units fighting the French.9

In addition, since the end of WWII Thai officials, including such ranking figures as Pridi Phanomyong and Navy Rear Admiral Sangwon Suwannanchip (see chapter 3), had arranged "special trains," more likely special freight cars, to transport by rail Vietnamese-procured arms and equipment to Thai frontier towns such as, Ubon and Surin. After

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6 Hoang Van Hoan, op. cit., p. 287. See chapter 4 for more details concerning the scale of Vietnamese émigré contributions to the resistance.
7 Som Tung, op. cit., p. 168. By renting some land from Thai friends in Ban Khon (Ubon province), Quynh Anh began planting vegetables and built a convalescent centre to tend to sick and wounded soldiers coming from the Western Front zone. According to Anh, there were usually seven to eight soldiers recovering here at any given time, usually suffering from malaria and scabies. The Thai town of Phimun also acted as a recovery station for injured soldiers coming from Laos. It had a large Vietnamese population and had sent a large number of youths to fight in Vietnam. Anh's son fought in the Western Front zone. Ibid., pp. 168-69.
8 This quote is taken from Hoang Van Hoan, op. cit., p. 287, writing decades later. "Western Front" is included in quotations marks in the original by Hoan.
Chapter 6

having secretly loaded arms and equipment on to these trains, Viet Minh adherents accompanied the shipments to the Thai-Indochinese border, escorted by Thai military police and, on certain occasions, even Thai ministers (probably northeastern Thai politicians such as Tiang Serikhan and Thongin Phuriphat). Arriving at the Indochinese border, Thai border authorities were often under direct instructions from Bangkok to permit Vietnamese cargoes to be transferred across the border without inspection. From the Indochinese frontier, mobile combat units were probably in charge of transporting these arms back to Vietnam (see chapter 4). Geopolitically speaking, the combination of a railway system connecting Bangkok to its key northeastern outposts along the Indochina border and a postwar Thai government making available large quantities of arms gave Thailand increased strategic value to the Vietnamese resistance during this period.

Perhaps most interesting was an alleged secret agreement between the Thais and DRV representatives in Thailand whereby Thai airplanes were to be leased to the Viet Minh to bring gold, opium, and other goods out of Indochina to Thailand to sell. With the money earned from such sales, the Viet Minh would purchase weapons, ammunition, medicines, and equipment in Thailand (and from elsewhere) to fly back to Indochina to use in the resistance against the French. Nguyễn Độc Quý said in an interview that these planes were to be flown by Thai pilots, with the understanding being that in the event of a fatal accident, the Vietnamese would have to provide for the family of the deceased pilot. While I have been unable to confirm whether any shipments were actually made by air, Quý implied in an interview that they had.

According to a French report in January 1947, following the outbreak of full-scale hostilities in Indochina, Thailand became "the principal source of rebel arms." Although the author of this document was unable to determine from where exactly the arms were being acquired, it said that in January 1947 a Viet Minh delegate in Bangkok had purchased an "important amount of rifles and ammunition," including light anti-tank weapons which were to be sent to southern Vietnam. Chinese Nationalist documents reported that in two purchases in 1947 the Viet Minh acquired 6,000 rifles, 400 machine-guns, 5 anti-aircraft guns, 200 mines, and 1,000 grenades. To operate buying missions and coordinate the transfer of this large amount of arms coming from the interior of Thailand, the Viet Minh stationed cadres in northeastern frontier towns, such as Ubon,

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10 Interviews with Nguyễn Độc Quý, 5 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City; Trần Văn Giàu, 3 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City; and a former Viet Minh official, 20 June 1989, Hanoi.
11 Until early December 1946, the Viet Minh had been able to transport these weapons by train well into western Cambodia because of Thai control of the Cambodian territories. This advantage was lost in mid-December when the territories were turned back over to the French by the Thais. See chapter 3.
12 Interview with Nguyễn Độc Quý, 5 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City.
14 Chen, op. cit., p. 189.
Aranyaprathet, Udon, Nong Khai, and Nakhon Phanom.\textsuperscript{15} In what appears to be a reference to the Viet Minh’s mobile combat units, French intelligence conceded in 1947 that "well armed groups" had been coming from Cambodia, the recently ceded territories, and Thailand on their way to Vietnam, although the amount of material transported overland was said to be relatively small. However, it was acknowledged that the amount of arms going by sea was much larger, with the French Navy being "totally insufficient in its ability to stop the main source of the material transported by sea."\textsuperscript{16} By 1949, the Secretary of Britain’s Joint Intelligence Agency (Far East) seems to have shared the French view, writing that "at present the main supplier of arms to the Viet [M]inh is Siam, from which country a regular traffic is maintained."\textsuperscript{17}

French intelligence also reported that Nguyễn Thanh Sơn was trying to procure negotiable goods from southern Vietnam which could be sent to the DRV mission in Thailand to be sold and the proceeds used to purchase weapons in Thailand. The arms would then be brought back to Indochina and distributed to General Nguyễn Bình and others.\textsuperscript{18} In other instances, rice was transported to Thailand from Laos and Cambodia to sell in the Thai market,\textsuperscript{19} while opium, spices, pepper (again much of it grown in Viet Minh-controlled areas in Laos and Cambodia), vegetables, and other products were transported to Thailand by the Viet Minh to buy arms and supplies.\textsuperscript{20} Also financing these activities was money that continued to be sent to representatives in Thailand from Vietnam. In February 1947, a Viet Minh official in Nakhon Phanom was sent 500,000 piastres. In another case, 16,000 piastres was said to have been shipped to the DRV delegation in Bangkok to buy radio receivers.\textsuperscript{21} Besides going toward the purchase of arms, these funds also bought much needed pharmaceuticals and medicines (such as penicillin and sulfur-drugs), surgical instruments, metals, electrical equipment, paper, chemicals, maintenance equipment for their arms industries, and weaving machines.\textsuperscript{22}

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\textsuperscript{15} SHAT, Carton 101, 'Trafic d'Armées et Activités du Siam au 15 Fevrier 1947.'
\textsuperscript{16} SHAT, Carton 102, 'Trafic d'Armées, l'Approvisionnement en armes et munitions des forces Vietnamiennes,' Saigon, Janvier 1947.
\textsuperscript{17} GB, JIC(FE)S5023(48)-17, 'Secretary, Joint Intelligence Committee (Far East),' 18 January 1949 in CRS 65377T1; SEATS 1 [Southeast Asia Top Secret], AA.
\textsuperscript{18} SHAT, Carton 101, 'Armes Trafic et activites du Siam au 15 Fev 1947.'
\textsuperscript{19} Paul Gey, 'Regression du Vietminh au Nam bo,' \textit{Indochine Sud-est Asiatique}, No. 9, (Août 1952).
\textsuperscript{21} SHAT, Carton 101, 'Armes Trafic et activites du Siam au 15 Fev 1947.' The DRV delegation exchanged these French piastres for Francs in Bangkok. Officials at the DRV delegation in Bangkok and elsewhere in Siam were also in radio communication with posts in zone 8 and others areas in Cochinchina concerning arms shipments and instructions. See: SHAT, Carton 101, File No. 121, "Armee VM. Liaison Transmission 1947 à 1954, Juin, Juillet, Août 1947."' 
\textsuperscript{22} Interview with Nguyễn Đức Quy, 5 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City; Despuich, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 135; and 'Armes Trafic et activites du Siam au 15 Fev 1947.' In June 1948, the VNS reported that the DRV delegation in Bangkok had received medical supplies valued at 1,260,000 baht from the Indian Red Cross. See: 'Gift from Indian Red Cross Received by Vietnam Delegation,' VNS, 15 June 1948.
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Even US Embassy officials in Bangkok made some radios and medicines available to DRV officials in Bangkok.\textsuperscript{23}

Besides being a source of arms and equipment for the Viet Minh, Thailand was also an important intermediary for arms shipments coming from Europe, the Philippines, Indonesia, Hong Kong, and China. The participation of ranking Thai military and civilian leaders in the arms trade and their willingness to work with the Vietnamese facilitated this process. As late as 1950, Nguyễn Văn Lỗng, who has been noted already as an important Viet Minh official working in Thailand after WWII, arranged twelve shipments of Czech arms which were sent via Italy to Jakarta, and then on to the southeastern Thai coast from where they were subsequently shipped to Nam Bộ by a sea route.\textsuperscript{24} In 1947, Vietnamese arms buyers in Thailand were negotiating with a European arms dealer concerning the purchase of Swedish Bofors surface-to-air weapons and 30,000 Japanese rifles.\textsuperscript{25} It was understood by the Australian Consul General in Bangkok in 1951 that Italian and Swedish arms still continued to reach the Viet Minh through Thailand.\textsuperscript{26}

Because Vietnamese access to rear bases in southern China and cooperation with the Chinese Communists still remained very difficult at this time, Thailand served as the DRV's major supply route during this crucial period. Somewhat ironically, during this same period Thailand seems to have been one contact point between Vietnamese and Chinese communist officials. In mid-1946, Chinese General Hsiang Ying, former deputy-commander of the Communist New Fourth Army, arrived in Siam to direct Chinese communist activities in Indochina. During his service in Thailand, he was in contact with Vietnamese representatives there and helped arrange the purchase and transport of arms to northern Vietnam. Sometime during the last half of 1947 he was transferred to work in northern Vietnam.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{23} Interview with Nguyễn Đốc Quý, 5 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City.

\textsuperscript{24} 'Letter from Alan Loomes,' 27 June 1951. In his letter to Critchley, Loomes said that he had "positive proof of the continued shipment of Czechoslovakian and Philippine arms to the Viet Minh." Long was known to have been shipping arms from the Philippines through Thailand as well.

\textsuperscript{25} 'Bulletin de Renseignements: Trafic d'Armes-Vente de 30.000 fusils japonais,' 12 au 24 Janvier 1947. By 1950, the US listed Thailand and the Philippines as the two main sources through which arms and war material were reaching the Viet Minh. See: US, DOS, 484A.008/5-1150, The Ambassador in Thailand (Stanton) to the Secretary of State, 11 May 1950 in FRUS (Volume VI, 1950), pp. 92-93; US, DOS, 492.00234/5-1150, The Acting Secretary of State to the Embassy in Thailand, 23 May 1950 in Ibid., pp. 96-98; and US, DOS, 492.00234/6-1750: Telegram, The Ambassador in Thailand (Stanton) to the Secretary of State, 17 June 1950 in Ibid., p. 102.

\textsuperscript{26} 'Letter from Alan Loomes,' 27 June 1951. Even when Phibun was in power, Loomes reported that he was "sure beyond reasonable doubt" that Nguyễn Văn Lỗng had a "private pipe-line into the Thai cabinet." Loomes felt that the Vietnamese had a link to the Thai cabinet through Luang Prom Yothi.

\textsuperscript{27} Chen, op. cit., p. 189.
Part II: Vietnamese Activities after the November 1947 Coup

II.1. The Impact of Changing Thai Political Conditions

From both Thai and Vietnamese sources, we know that former Seri Thai cadres now holding senior government positions provided the Viet Minh with access to arms which had been stockpiled since the end of WWII. Trần Văn Giáp said that just prior to the November 1947 coup in Bangkok, he (and no doubt other DRV officials) concluded an agreement with some of these Thai officials whereby the Vietnamese would take over a large (though unspecified) quantity of arms. While it is unclear which Thai officials arranged this arms transfer, it must have been approved at a high-level if we can believe Giáp’s statement that this was a very sizable shipment.28

A 9 December article in the Thai newspaper, Siang Thai (The Voice of Thailand) may not have been unrelated to Giáp's arms agreement, when it reported that ten thousand helmets had been found by Thai military authorities in a house in Bangkapi following the November coup. This house was being rented by Thong Kantatham, a former Seri Thai partisan and Deputy Minister of the Interior from the northeast who had worked with the Viet Minh since at least 1945 (see chapter 3). Also found in the house were two Vietnamese who told Thai military authorities that the helmets had been purchased by them to be taken back to Vietnam to use in the war against the French and not to be used in a revolution against the Thais. The two Vietnamese were said to have been former officers in the Vietnamese army now in Bangkok as buying agents for the Vietnamese army.29 In what may have been another related development, "a group of Vietnamese" presented the Thai Ministry of Defence with a claim to the arms and ammunition seized by military authorities from the residence of Thongin Phuriphat, a former Minister of Industry and Seri Thai associate of Pridi. The Vietnamese said they could produce evidence proving their claim to the arms.30

Concerning the acquisition of the Vietnamese-claimed arms by Thai military authorities following the November coup, Nguyễn Đức Quy said that "Thai Army Generals" arrived at his home in Bangkapi to question him as to the provenance of these weapons.

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28 As we know from chapter 3, Tieng Serikhan, Thongin Phuriphat, and Chamlong Daoruang were three men who had taken charge of these weapons after WWII came to an end. No doubt, Pridi was aware of the destination of these arms as well. See chapters 3 and 4.

29 Siang Thai, 9 December 1947. The helmets had been made from the metal of 200 litre capacity fuel oil drums. According to a former Viet Minh officer who transported arms from Thailand to Indochina, weapons were sometimes stored in Pridi Phanomyong's home. Interview with a former Viet Minh official, 20 June 1989, Hanoi.

30 Suwannaphum, 13 December 1947 and US, DOS, 751G.92/4-248, 'Memorandum of Conversation between Aphaiwong and Stanton,' 2 April 1948, USNA, p. 1. Trần Văn Giáp was in contact with Thongin shortly before and after the November coup. Interview with Trần Văn Giáp, 3 April 1989, Hồ Chí Minh City.
Qùy explained in an interview in 1989 that the arms which the Thai military confiscated from the Vietnamese had been purchased from former Seri Thai officials by DRV representatives working in Thailand. Qùy assured the Thai generals that the arms were not to be used against the new government in a coup; instead they were to be transported back to Vietnam to use in the fight against the French.\footnote{Interview with Nguyên Đức Qùy, 5 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City.}

While there are few details available concerning the rate of Vietnamese arms transfers from Thailand to Indochina after the November coup, to DRV officials working in Thailand it must have been clear from the abovementioned incidents that their work in Thailand would not operate as smoothly as it had during the pre-coup period. The November 1947 coup which toppled the Thamrong government, exiled Pridi Phanomyong and many of his political allies, and paved the way for Phibun Songkhram's return to power in April 1948 had changed the rules governing Vietnamese operations in Thailand, posing a potentially formidable threat to Vietnamese activities there. No longer did the Viet Minh have former Seri Thai allies holding top positions in Thai government.

The implications for the Vietnamese of the political changes underway in Bangkok after November 1947 did not go unnoticed by the ICP. Nowhere can this be seen better than in the dispatch to Thailand of Hoàng Văn Hoan, an individual whom we first met in chapter 1.\footnote{In his memoir, 	extit{A Drop in the Ocean}, published in 1986, Hoan dedicates twenty-three pages to a discussion of the reorganisation of Vietnamese activities in Thailand which, he claims, he presided over on behalf of the ICP between 1948 and 1949. Of this, he dedicates ten pages to a discussion of the problems Vietnam had in its relations with the Cambodians and Lao resistance movements operating from Thailand during this period. Although difficult not to cite Hoan's memoirs at length, I have not assumed that Hoan provides a complete and un-biased account of the state of Vietnamese activities in Thailand during 1948-49. In discussing Vietnam's relations with the Lao and Cambodians in the postwar period in his memoir, Hoan must have had the events of the late 1970s in mind. As has been mentioned, in mid-1979 Hoan, a ranking Vietnamese communist, defected to China where he singled out Hanoi's Cambodia policy for particular criticism. Unfortunately, Vietnamese communist publications are as quiet in their discussion of Thailand's importance during the 1947-1949 period as Hoan is vocal in his memoir. For example, Lê Mạnh Trinh and Quyền Anh (both veteran ICP leaders who worked in Thailand into the 1950s) skip over almost completely the 1947-1949 period! Keeping in mind the danger of relying on only one source, the sections I have used from Hoan's memoirs have been matched, where possible, against the interviews of former DRV representatives who worked in Thailand during the late 1940s. In some cases, where I have been unable to cross-check Hoan's memoir with the interviews, I have been able to draw upon Thai sources.}

In March 1948, Phạm Ngọc Thạch returned to the hills of northern Vietnam from Thailand to inform the ICP Central Committee of a request by Vietnamese officials in Thailand that Hoan be dispatched to Thailand. Thạch explained in a meeting with Hoan, Hồ Chí Minh, and Trương Chinh that although Vietnamese cadres in Thailand had accomplished much in Thailand since the end of WWII, work among the overseas Vietnamese remained deficient and the links between officials working at the DRV delegation in Bangkok and those cadres working in the northeast were less than acceptable. As for the delegation in Bangkok, its members were said to have "not taken adequate interest in activating Vietnamese nationals in northeast Thailand."\footnote{Hoàng Văn Hoan, 	extit{op. cit.}, p. 281. Trương Chinh was the Secretary General of the ICP.} In what
appears to be a reference to communist members who had worked in northeast Thailand since the 1920s and 1930s, Thạch said that many comrades who had been working in Thailand for many years knew Hoan and wanted the ICP Central Committee to send him to Thailand in order to re-establish more effective resistance activities.34

After discussions with Hồ and Trương Chinh, Hoan says he agreed to go to Thailand. Hồ appointed him a representative of the ICP's Central Committee and empowered him to administer to all affairs relating to work among the overseas Vietnamese in Thailand. In addition, Hồ approved documents making Hoan the Special Overseas Representative of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.35 In May 1948, twenty years after making his first trip to Thailand, Hoan returned for a second time. Hoan's work in Thailand entailed the re-organisation of activities among the overseas Vietnamese; the re-organisation of the work of the delegations in Bangkok and Rangoon; and the re-organisation of Vietnamese assistance to the Lao and Cambodian revolutions.36

Upon arriving in northeast Thailand, Hoan travelled to Ubon where he met with Nguyễn Đức Quy, who reported on Phibun's return to power and the negative effects this was having on Vietnamese activities in Thailand. Before leaving Vietnam, Hồ had instructed him to replace Quy as the President of the DRV delegation in Bangkok. However, after further observation Hoan says he kept Quy in place for fear of drawing the attention of the Thais, and thereby running the risk that the Phibun government would use such a change as an opportunity to reject the DRV delegation altogether since Thailand had never officially recognised it. Hoan says that he chose to work from behind-the-scenes, taking charge of policy matters, Party work, and helping cadres with projects among the Vietnamese émigrés in Thailand.37

From Ubon, Hoan went to Udon to meet with officials in the Overseas Vietnamese Special Committee and the Overseas Vietnamese National Salvation General Association. One of his impressions during travel in the northeast was that since the outbreak of war in Indochina, the Vietnamese in Thailand had displayed their activities much too openly, to the point where they now attracted the attention of a Thai government increasingly hostile to Vietnamese activities, to say nothing of possible negative repercussions on local opinion. Hoan also criticised cadres for not reading Thai newspapers, from which it was clear the Phibun government was preparing to crack-down on Vietnamese activities and had already begun a policy of spreading rumours and slandering the Vietnamese. In a move to address such serious problems, Hoan says he suggested to the Special Committee that a Congress be convened to draw together leaders from Party branches and

34 Ibid., p. 281.
35 Ibid., p. 281 with confirmation from Trần Văn Giàu [interview], 3 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City.
37 Ibid., p. 284.
overseas Vietnamese committees from all over Thailand and western Indochina. Significantly, Hoan does not mention in his memoir having invited representatives from the DRV delegation in Bangkok.

On 15, 16, and 17 August 1948, this Congress was held in Udon. In addressing delegates, Hoan reviewed the favourable conditions that had been available to the Vietnamese in Thailand since the end of WWII. Attention was then turned to a discussion of the changing political climate in Bangkok, the overt displays of Vietnamese activities in Thailand, and the negative effects this was having on Vietnamese work in Thailand. Hoan stressed that such actions violated Thai law, citing such examples as the public display of the Vietnamese flag on Thai soil and Vietnamese soldiers from the Western Front who flaunted arms in Thai towns for all to see. Hoan also pointed out that some Vietnamese openly advertised their communist credentials through the publication of communist materials and papers which were sold in a store called the "New Thailand."

Judging from a Thai editorial published even before the November 1947 coup, Hoan may not have been exaggerating the potential negative effects of such overt actions on Thai public opinion. In a lengthy commentary entitled *Vietnamese Communists in Siam*, by a Siamese, one critic wrote in a Thai daily as follows:

Siam has opened her doors out of compassion for fellow human beings to the Vietnamese refugees, but unfortunately it has turned out that these refugees... are Communists who seek to spread Communism in Siam, too. This minority is not only enjoying equal rights with the Siamese, but is also trying to exercise special rights, unsuitable to foreign residents in a fully independent country... In Nakhon Phanom they have their own legislative body whose members are openly elected by the Vietnamese in that province. They also have their own administrative body for the dual purpose of restoring Vietnamese independence and propagation of the Communist doctrine... The Vietnamese have better rights to defend themselves than the Siamese, as every day we can see Vietnamese walking in the streets carrying rifles or sub-machine guns without being molested. Any Siamese who does so is liable to be arrested... Thus it can be seen that these Vietnamese Communists are enjoying better rights than the true owners of the land... [and] spread unmeritorious propaganda about the Siamese people and Siamese officialdom. The Siamese people should realise how harmful it is for us to be too generous in admitting foreigners and giving them special

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40 *bid.*, pp. 287-93 and Interview with Nguyễn Đức Quy, 5 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City.
rights. As to the government, we think if it is not too weak it would do well to take appropriate steps in this matter immediately.41

Naturally, the future course of Vietnamese resistance activities in Thailand was a priority topic on the agenda of the Udon meeting, with Thailand's important strategic position to the resistance being one of the most important factors to be kept in mind. Writing decades later, Hoan summarised the main points of his address to this 1948 meeting in his memoir as follows in part:

From the day our [Indochinese Communist] Party was established, the Overseas Vietnamese Party branch in Thailand has made many important contributions, most importantly during the period when the Indochinese Assistance Section was in operation following the destruction of the Soviet Nghê-Tinh high point. In addition to this was the period during which the overseas Vietnamese in Laos and Thailand participated in the 1945 Lao revolution. These days our people's national resistance is in a difficult stage. With Vietnam surrounded on four sides, the Overseas Vietnamese Party branch in Thailand has a very important role to play. Because there are many overseas Vietnamese bases with individuals of a profound revolutionary spirit in Thailand and because in the previous few years a progressive Thai government created favourable conditions for overseas Vietnamese patriotic activities, Thailand has become the sole corridor (cửa ngõ duy nhất) to the international community for the Vietnamese and Indochinese resistance movements.42

With China's communist victory still over a year away, Hoan stressed the crucial role Thailand continued to play as a major supply route. As he wrote in his memoir:

If one wanted to supply the Vietnamese resistance with essential arms and equipment, then it was necessary to guard the Thai corridor. For these reasons, Thailand's geography had an exceedingly important (vô cùng quan trọng) strategic position in relation to the Vietnamese and Indochinese revolutions during this period [1946-1948]. And also for that reason the responsibility of every cadre, party member, and overseas Vietnamese national was to preserve our strong position in Thailand.43

Speaking in separate interviews in April 1989, Trần Văn Giàu and Nguyễn Độc Quy agreed that Thailand had an exceedingly important strategic position in relation to the Vietnamese resistance against the French during this period, citing Chiang Kaishek's

41 'Special Article: Vietnamese Communists in Siam . . . by a Siamese,' Warasap, 23 September 1947.
42 Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., pp. 288-89. It appears that Hoan did not have access to a copy of his original speech given to the Udon Congress in 1948 while preparing his memoir for publication following his defection to China in 1979.
43 Ibid., p. 289. It will be recalled that in 1969 US Ambassador Leonard Unger described Thailand's importance to the US as "exceedingly important."
denial of bases to the Vietnamese in southern China and French military action against Vietnam from all directions.\textsuperscript{44}

One concrete suggestion Hoan says he made at this meeting was aimed at preserving Vietnamese activities in Thailand through the promotion of strict adherence to Thai laws, a theme which had first been advocated by Đặng Thúc Héra and Hồ Chí Minh decades earlier. To this end, he developed what he called a policy of \textit{Vietnamese-Thai Friendship (Việt-Thai Thân Thiên)}. This policy emphasised the need to respect Thai laws and customs and was designed particularly to win over the continued sympathy of Thai authorities in the northeast at a time when it was felt that the Bangkok government was preparing to suppress the Vietnamese. If a number of these officials remained sympathetic to the Vietnamese cause, despite the change of government in Bangkok, the Vietnamese could still continue their activities under favourable circumstances. As a result, the "open displays" were quickly brought to an end: Vietnamese flags were not flown in public and Western Front troops were reportedly banned from carrying their arms in open on Thai soil.\textsuperscript{45}

In addition to trying to increase Vietnamese compliance with Thai law, also discussed during the August congress was the need to widen resistance influence among the overseas Vietnamese. Stressing the recurrent need for more "linking together," Hoan and other cadres sought to re-strengthen resistance activities as quickly as possible and to prevent the destruction of political work which had already been completed. Efforts were also made to increase the secrecy of political and military work in the region. Hoan says the actions agreed upon at the Udon meeting were well-timed, for at the end of August Thai authorities began some of their first searches of Vietnamese homes in the northeast, but were allegedly frustrated by their failure to find incriminating communist evidence.\textsuperscript{46}

\section*{II.2. Re-organising the DRV Delegation in Bangkok}

Besides setting out a clear line for resistance work among the overseas Vietnamese in northeast Thailand, Hoàng Văn Hoan was also worried by the failure of a number of cadres in northeast Thailand to support the work of the DRV delegation in Bangkok. Cooperation between the leaders of the overseas Vietnamese in northeast Thailand and the delegation in Bangkok was marred by mistrust on both sides. Vietnamese cadres working in the austere northeast were upset by the relatively posh lifestyle enjoyed by their counterparts in Bangkok. Hoan says in his memoir that he had to dedicate a great deal of time to convincing leaders in the northeast that despite the better living conditions

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{44} Interviews with Nguyễn Đốc Quý, 5 April 1989, Hồ Chí Minh City and Trần Văn Giâu, 3 April 1989, Hồ Chí Minh City.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Hoàng Văn Hoan, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 289-91 and Interview with Hoàng Nhật Tân, 5 May 1989, Hanoi.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Hoàng Văn Hoan, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 294 and also Interview with Nguyễn Đốc Quý, 5 April 1989, Hồ Chí Minh City.
\end{itemize}
at the delegation, these diplomats served a very important function for the nation. Without providing any details, Hoan only says that after discussions with northeastern cadres concerning this problem, relations improved between the two sides.47

While more research remains to be done before we can say anything more definitive about this matter, there must have been other, more serious reasons for the lack of cooperation between the two sides. After all this was one of the main reasons that led to the high-level dispatch of Hoan to Thailand. It is worth considering the possibility that there were two different directions informing Vietnamese resistance activities in Thailand that came to a head by 1948. One was run by activists in the northeast concerned with events in northern Vietnam, while the other was administered by cadres working from Bangkok, the majority of whom were probably more concerned with the course of events in southern Vietnam. As we know from chapter 1, the Vietnamese leadership in the northeast was dominated by cadres from Nghe-Tinh. They had worked and lived in spartan conditions in northeast Thailand since the late 1920s and 1930s and were in firm control of Vietnamese organisations in the area. Because their resistance activities had historically been orientated toward northern Vietnam and southern China (and not toward southern Vietnam or Vietnamese communities in Cambodia), these cadres were probably ill-informed about the activities of their southern counterparts after WWII. Secondly, ranking southern communists were unable to attend the Tân Trào congress, and were thus probably unaware of the guide-lines directing the work of Viet Minh adherents in Laos and northeast Thailand after WWII. Moreover, they had their own agenda, quite different from their northern counterparts. Because war broke out in Nam Bồ in September 1945—over a year before it did in northern Vietnam—southern leaders in Thailand were much more interested in assisting the war effort in the south, and in so doing effectively altered the direction of resistance activities in Thailand away from its previous northern Vietnamese orientation. As we know, throughout 1946 a number of high-ranking southern officials were working in Thailand, in charge of arms shipments, contacts with the Thai government and military, the outfitting of combat units, and cooperation with the Cambodian resistance movement. In many respects, by mid-1946 southerners had already established a western corridor linking eastern Thailand to Nam Bồ through routes crossing Cambodia and by sea.48 In this context, it is possible that following the outbreak of war in all of Vietnam in December 1946, the ICP did not give any clear directions to cadres in Thailand concerning the administration of these two different components of Vietnamese resistance activities in Thailand. Both sides may have been competing for limited resources. This might explain why some cadres, almost certainly those in the northeast, finally had to ask Hoan (a northerner and veteran communist who

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47 Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., pp. 294-95. Unfortunately, we have no other sources against which to compare Hoan's account.

48 It will be recalled that ICP bases in northeastern Thailand up to this time had been concentrated in bases along the Thai-Lao border and not the Thai-Cambodian one.
had worked in Thailand in the late 1920s and 1930s) to come there to reorganise resistance activities.49

Whatever the case, Hoan arrived in Bangkok sometime during the latter half of 1948 and says he set about re-organising the work of the delegation. Upset by what he saw as haphazard and casual administration, Hoan argued that, as a diplomatic office, the delegation had to maintain a dignified and professional appearance.50 He also felt that members of the delegation had fallen out of touch with activities in the northeast because of "careless" operation. Hoan discussed these problems with Quy and members of the Overseas Vietnamese Special Committee. Thereafter, Hoan says he asked permission from the ICP Central Committee to establish a new body, separate from the delegation, called the Central Committee Working Overseas Office (Ban Cần Sự Trung Uyển ở Hải Ngoại). This committee took over the leadership "of all work which had to be implemented in Thailand." These tasks included: 1) the organisation and mobilisation of the overseas Vietnamese in Thailand in order to increase their patriotic unity, support for the resistance, and to guard the Thai "gateway" to the international community; 2) the reorganisation of assistance to the Lao and Cambodian resistance movements from the west; 3) the organisation and administration of supply matters; 4) the administration of foreign affairs, consisting of international propaganda efforts and the activities of government representatives in Thailand and Burma; and 5) strengthening cooperation with officials in France and Czechoslovakia.51

Hoan became the secretary of the Overseas Office, while Quy took over as the deputy secretary.52 A certain Hồng and Song Tung were members of the Office who also served in the Overseas Vietnamese Special Committee. Joining them from the Western Front General Staff were a Khanh and Binh (almost certainly Võ Hữu Bình), while Cao Hồng Linh (Lanh) and Dung Văn Phúc represented the Vietnamese supply and procurement section in Thailand on this Commission.53 Almost all of these individuals were ICP members.

Unfortunately, we have very little information about how this Overseas Office worked. However, we do know that one of the delegation's problems in relation to the

49 Commenting on the leadership of Vietnamese resistance activities in Thailand after WWII, Trần Văn Đình said in a June 1990 interview that Trần Văn Giàu realised in Thailand the ramifications for his work there of not having attended Tân Trào. Đình, who was working from Bangkok during this period and was not a communist, claims that Giàu was not an insider of the communist leadership in Thailand. Interview with Trần Văn Đình, 20 June 1990, Washington, D.C. I have been unable to confirm this.
50 The timing of this matter coincided with stepped up efforts by the French to win over international and regional recognition of Bảo Đại.
51 Hoàng Văn Hoàn, op. cit., p. 296; Interviews with Nguyễn Đức Quy, 5 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City and Interview with Trần Văn Giàu, 3 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City. Both Quy and Giàu agreed that these five points were introduced.
52 Interview with Nguyễn Đức Quy, 5 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City and Hoàng Văn Hoàn, op. cit., p. 297.
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overseas Vietnamese during this period was enlisting young men to serve in the resistance in Vietnam. While many Vietnamese in Thailand joined combat units set up in Thailand since late 1945 (see chapters 3 and 4), recruitment was by no means a popular policy among all the Vietnamese in northeast Thailand. Those officials in charge of enlisting young Vietnamese nationals, such as Trần Văn Giâu, often encountered hostility during recruiting trips to northeast Thailand. Giâu explained in an interview that he was far from popular among some Vietnamese families, especially among women in the northeast who were not keen on losing their loved ones on faraway battlefields in Vietnam.54 In a statement in support of the French-backed Bảo Đại government in 1951, the wife of Phạm Văn Bạch mentioned this matter specifically in a scathing attack on Vietnamese activities in Thailand. She opposed what she saw as the forced, communist recruitment of young overseas Vietnamese men and their dispatch to Vietnam in overseas fighting units. Madame Bạch said that those who refused to join could be charged with treason and killed by the Vietnamese communist organisation in Thailand, citing the murders of a Lý Hoa Vinh and Lê Bien.55 Not surprisingly, published communist Vietnamese sources make no mention of such matters, and interviewees are less than forthcoming, so it has thus been impossible to confirm this allegation.

Another problem was the existence in Bangkok of the International Liaison Centre of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (see chapter 4). As we have noted earlier, this was another information service (possibly an appendage of the VNS) used to disseminate information on the DRV to the international community. To western journalists, however, this centre was suspected of being a communist front and was often referred to as the Comintern's office in Southeast Asia. Hoan claims he advised that this centre be dismantled immediately in order to transfer much needed manpower to foreign affairs duties and to avoid attracting the attention of the Phibun government.56

Concerning the need to improve the delegation's appearance and effectiveness, Hoan and others rented a villa to separate the delegation from the VNS. This villa could house

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54 Interview with Trần Văn Giâu, 3 April 1989, Hồ Chí Minh City.
55 'The Broadcast Statement of the wife of Mr. Phạm Văn Bạch,' Vietnam News Bureau, 2 June 1951. While this statement must be used with care, Madame Bạch, who worked in Thailand for at least four years (1946-1950), singles out her disagreement with Vietnamese communist activities in Thailand as one of the reasons leading her to switch over to supporting Bảo Đại. There is evidence from other DRV officials who worked in Thailand during this time indicating that violent breaks did occur among the Vietnamese leadership in Thailand in the late 1940s. One former Vietnamese official who wishes to remain anonymous told the author in an interview that there were severe conflicts among the Vietnamese leadership in Thailand during the late 1940s and there was even talk of assassination plots. Another former ranking DRV official in Thailand during this period told the author that concerning Vietnamese affairs in Thailand in the late 1940s, there are "many stories which still remain secret and should not be discussed."

56 Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 299. I have been unable to determine whether this was a communist organisation.
ten to thirty cadres and was a more appropriate site for a diplomatic office. It was located on Sathon road, ironically positioned between the Soviet and American Embassies.\textsuperscript{57}

Sometime at the end of 1948 or the beginning of 1949, the Central Committee Working Overseas Office convened a meeting in Bangkok for cadres conducting foreign affairs work abroad. When addressing the meeting, Hoan stressed the importance of supporting the DRV's policies and the need to avoid "free manifestations of individualism" and "diversions from the DRV's line and policies."\textsuperscript{58} Once again, Hoan emphasised the importance of maintaining a high standard of protocol. While he does not say it, it seems clear that Hoan and others must have had political changes in the region in mind—most probably attempts by the French, and increasingly the Americans, to win over regional support for the Bảo Đại regime.\textsuperscript{59}

II.3. Relations with the Lao and Cambodian Resistance in Thailand

The French and Americans were also competing with DRV officials in Thailand for influence over the Cambodian and Lao resistance groups based there. The Vietnamese were well aware of these efforts, and responded by trying to forge better cooperation with their resistance counterparts operating from Thailand. Again, our discussion of this topic is restricted greatly by the fact that there is little information available concerning Vietnamese relations with the Cambodian and Lao resistance leaders located in Thailand between 1947-1949. Nonetheless, with the French in control of much of Laos and Cambodia and with many of the major resistance leaders of these two countries operating from Thailand, Thailand must have been a key contact point for the DRV with its Lao and Cambodian resistance partners. As we have seen in chapters 3 and 4, following the French reoccupation of Cambodia (September-October 1945) and Laos (March-May 1946), a number of Cambodian and Lao resistance leaders had gone westward into Thailand to continue their anti-French activities. Together with the ICP's Overseas Vietnamese Special Committee based in northeast Thailand, the DRV delegation in Bangkok was responsible for assisting the Lao and Cambodians against the French.

\textsuperscript{57} Working from its office in Bangkok and with the permission of Burmese government officials, the DRV established another delegation in Rangoon in early 1948. This office was under the leadership of Dr. Trần Văn Luhn, a former member of the delegation in Bangkok. "Vietnam Diplomatic Representative Arrives in Burma," VNS, 9 March 1948 and Hồang Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 302.

\textsuperscript{58} At about the same time the Overseas Commission was being put together, Hoan says that Lê Hy, the head of the Vietnam News Service, mysteriously left Bangkok without informing his superiors. At first it was thought he had either tired of his work and took leave for some place in Thailand or he had been arrested by the Thai police. However, within a short period of time, the Soviet delegation in Bangkok informed DRV officials that Lê Hy had arrived in Moscow safely. Hoan claims he was greatly worried by this incident, fearing that Hy might have some hidden political agenda explaining his "undisciplined" action. Immediately the Soviet government and Central Committee were informed by the Vietnamese that Hy's actions were in no way condoned by the ICP Central Committee. Hoan says it was soon learned that Hy "had been influenced by the incorrect ideology" of Trần Ngọc Danh, the president of the DRV delegation in Paris. Both had allegedly objected to the Party's slowness in implementing socialist policies, such as land reforms and an official announcement opposing the imperialist bloc, and had hoped the Soviet communists would somehow be helpful. See: Hồang Văn Hoan, op. cit., pp. 298-99.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., pp.303-04.
Immediately after the outbreak of full-scale war in Indochina in December 1946, the ICP Central Committee had directed its Overseas Party branch in Thailand to support the Lao and Cambodian resistance groups from the west.\(^{60}\) Nguyễn Đức Quý said in an interview that upon setting up the DRV delegation in Bangkok in mid-1946, he was instructed to assist and build cooperation with the Lao and Cambodian resistance leaders operating in Thailand, albeit the extent of Vietnamese aid was limited by a paucity of funds.\(^{61}\) Quý said that he mainly provided the Lao and Cambodians with information on military and political developments in Indochina and the course of Franco-Vietnamese negotiations.\(^{62}\)

Militarily, the delegation served as liaison for implementation of some Lao-Vietnamese-Cambodian anti-French activities in northeastern Thailand and western Indochina. According to a French intelligence report dated June 1948, a combined Vietnamese-Lao-Cambodian staff was based in Bangkok. It was reportedly led by a certain Cambodian named Song Sarik, with Prince Phetsarath and Thao Oun representing the Lao Issara and Trần Văn Dinh acting as the Viet Minh’s representative.\(^{63}\) In charge of a separate Cambodian-Vietnamese Mixed Staff was Vũ Hữu Bình.\(^{64}\)

Of course, most important to Vietnamese strategists in terms of their interest in expanding links with the Lao and Cambodian resistance movements based out of Thailand was the course of French military operations in Vietnam during this period. On the northwestern flank, Vietnamese military leaders were very worried by French military movements along the Vietnamese-Lao border. As we saw in chapter 3, in February 1946 the Chinese allowed French troops from southern China to move into northeastern Laos

\(^{60}\) Ibid., p. 305 for the quote, cited with reference to Interviews with Nguyen Đức Quý, 3 April 1989, Hồ Chí Minh City; Trần Văn Giản, 5 April 1989, Hồ Chí Minh City; and Hoàng Nhật Tân, 5 May 1989, Hanoi. As we have noted, one of the twelve points of Hồ Chí Minh’s 22 December 1946 Call for Nationwide Resistance was “solidarity with the Lao and Cambodians.” See: Lịch Sử Quân Đội, pp. 253-55.

\(^{61}\) It appears that Souphanouvong, whose relationship with other Lao nationalists in Bangkok was increasingly rocky by 1949, was working closely with DRV representatives in Bangkok concerning the need for financial assistance. In one instance, Katay Don Sasorith cites “a high Vietnamese official” in Bangkok telling him that Souphanouvong had received 20,000 ticals (Baht) from the DRV delegation in Bangkok. See: ‘Letter 2: Note on Subject of the Resignation of Prince Souphanouvong . . . ’ in Brown and Zasloff, op. cit., pp. 349 and 352.

\(^{62}\) Interview with Nguyễn Đức Quý, 3 April 1989, Hồ Chí Minh City. During his stop-overs in Bangkok, Phạm Ngọc Thạch also met with Lao resistance leaders to win over their support. US, DOS, 892.00/5-2347, ‘Fortnightly Summary of Political Events in Siam for the Period April 16-April 30, 1947,’ 23 May 1947, USNA, p. 3.

\(^{63}\) ‘Organisation de l’Autorité Politico-Militaire Adverse en Indochine, Juin 1948.’ This report listed Vietnamese leaders of the Oubon committee as Nguyễn Như; in Surin, Mai Văn Quang; in Udon, Đình Văn Khánh. Trần Đức Văn was president of the Overseas Vietnamese National Salvation Association in Thailand and incorrectly referred to as the former head of the Delegation. Lê Hữu Hồng was said to be in charge of war coordination matters at the DRV delegation, while Nguyễn Văn Long was reportedly administering to population matters, which probably meant administering to overseas Vietnamese organisations. The President of the Khmer Issarak delegation was Pok Kun, with the nominal head of the organisation being Chawalit Aphaiwong, the brother of the former Thai Prime Minister Khuang Aphaiwong.

\(^{64}\) Hoàng Văn Thái, ed., Trần Đình Ba Mười Nằm, Kỳ Sử Lịch Sử [The Thirty Year War, A Historical Chronicle], (Hanoi: NXBQDND, 1983), p. 338. This staff was probably located somewhere in western Indochina.
and northwestern Vietnam, where they soon occupied the towns of Lai Châu and Sơn La and eventually took Nghĩa Đô and Lào Cai by early 1948. In February 1947, the Vietnamese Ministry of Defence-General Staff had already instructed soldiers in northwestern Vietnam to assist the Lao in operations against the French.65

To the south, the Vietnamese felt that the French would use Cambodia as a springboard from which to attack northern Vietnam.66 Following the outbreak of war, the French not only seized most towns in northern Vietnam, but also began moving up the coast from Đà Nẵng in 1947, taking control of strategically important towns, roads, and communications points in the Binh-Tri-Thiên area (the three central provinces of Quảng Bình, Quảng Trị, and Thừa Thiên). According to one Vietnamese source, because the French took control of this area, the ICP had to assign the Regional Committee of Nam Bộ the important task of "reverse supplying." This meant that arms and equipment were brought out of Nam Bộ to the "Cambodia-Thai-Lao Road" in order to be distributed to other areas to the north.67 Worried by French control of the narrow Binh-Tri-Thiên hinge of Vietnam, in mid-1948 the ICP instructed cadres to widen cooperation with the Lao and Cambodians to increase the number of battles with the French, and thereby disperse and weaken their forces (see Map V).68 In early 1948, the Khmer Issarak formed the Khmer People's Liberation Committee which worked closely with the Việt Minh.69

As a ranking ICP Central Committee member, Hoàng Văn Hoan must have had these factors in mind when working to increase military cooperation with Cambodian and Lao resistance leaders in Thailand in mid-1948. In Hoan's opinion, while Vietnamese assistance to the Lao and Cambodians from Thailand had had successes, a number of problems were seriously affecting the ability of the Vietnamese to work with its resistance counterparts. On one occasion Nguyễn Đức Quy informed Hoan that Prince

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66 For evidence of this fear, see: Hoàng Văn Thái, op. cit., p. 139, quoting from a letter from the ICP to cadres in Nam Bộ found in the Vietnamese Communist Party Office Archives, C1, Q2, 9a.
67 Nguyễn Hao Hưng, op. cit., pp. 145-46 for evidence of the reverse supplying and Lịch Sử Quán Sĩ, pp. 286-88 and 352-61, for more details concerning Vietnamese view of French action in Binh-Tri-Thiên area. By the end of 1946, Vietnam had been divided into twelve war zones. See Lockhart, op. cit., pp. 162 and 199 for a list and map of the zones, respectively.
68 Hoàng Văn Thái, op. cit., p. 323 and Lịch Sử Quán Dị, pp. 352-61 used in conjunction with Lockhart, op. cit., pp. 186-93, especially p. 193. In July 1950, Trương Chinh reviewed the strategic situation of the Vietnamese resistance against the French. At the outset of his discussion, Chinh pointed out how the French had moved to "organise the Cambodians and Lao into two separate battlefields" and had concluded an agreement with the PhủSPAN government to protect the western borders of those two countries. In response, Trương Chinh said that the Vietnamese had expanded their bases and developed guerrilla war in Cambodia and Laos in an effort to restrict the military activities of the French to the Binh-Tri-Thiên area where the French were targeting their military efforts. Laos and Cambodia would become two rear areas from which the Vietnamese would attack the French in central Vietnam. See: Trương Chinh, 'Chúng Ta Đã Làm Gì và Cần Phải Làm Gì Để Chuyền Sang Giải Đoạn Mới?' [What We Have Done and What Must we Still Must Do in order to Move to a New Period?], Tạp Chí Cộng Sản [The Communist Review], August 1950, No. 2 in KCTT, Vol. 2, p. 407.
Souphanouvong wanted to leave Bangkok to reside in a different place. After an investigation of the matter, Hoan claims it became clear that the problem stemmed from "undisciplined" actions taken by a Vietnamese military unit operating in southern Laos which had taken arms from a Lao unit in order to make better use of them. This had led to a serious clash between the two sides, leading Souphanouvong to lose faith in Vietnamese intentions. While the problem was evidently solved successfully, the Vietnamese continued to pay close attention to the importance of maintaining good relations with the Lao and the Cambodians and remained worried by competing French and the Americans efforts in Thailand to win over their support.

After this incident, Hoan says that he focused his attention on ways by which Vietnamese aid to the Lao and Cambodians could be improved. At the end of 1948, the Central Committee Working Overseas Office organised a Congress of the Western Front to fix a number of priorities concerning Vietnamese assistance to the Lao and Cambodian revolutions. Delegates came from Bangkok and the zones comprising the Western Front. During this meeting, it was allegedly agreed that cadres in the Western Front had neglected their duties of organising the masses, building regional bases, and training soldiers and cadres for the Lao and Cambodians. Secondly, the emphasis on military matters had been too heavy and that on politics too light. Soldiers had carried out propaganda in Laos and Cambodia in order to provide themselves with places to fight the French, without recognising the importance of creating revolutionary bases among the Lao and Cambodian masses. Another point this congress discussed was the inappropriate way by which Viet Minh officials working in the Western Front applied Vietnamese models too rigidly in Laos and Cambodia, without taking into account the different conditions and characteristics of these areas and their peoples. As a result, a number of Lao and Cambodians who finished Viet Minh training classes "had doubts and moved further away from us."

However, in the end it is doubtful if any of Hoan's recommendations had time to be implemented. Indeed, Thailand's position as a meeting place for the Vietnamese with the Lao and Cambodians was about to come to an end, for rapidly changing events in China were realigning Vietnamese strategic interests toward the north. Following the fall of Manchuria to the Communists in late 1948, the Chinese Communists made big military gains against Nationalists forces and cooperation with Viet Minh forces along the Sino-
Vietnamese border began to increase markedly.\footnote{Chen, op. cit., pp. 195-200. Chen says that by the end of 1948 three local Chinese Communist units arrived at the Sino-Vietnamese border.} Within a few months, Hoan left Thailand for Moscow and Peking.

II.4. Changes in Thai Policy toward Vietnamese Activities in Thailand

Further detracting from Thailand's value to the Vietnamese was the tougher line being taken by Phibun toward Vietnamese resistance activities in Thailand. While DRV partisans did their best to maintain his favour (see chapter 5), there was little they could do about it. By late 1949 and early 1950 the arrival of the Cold War in Southeast Asia and domestic Thai political changes saw Phibun adopt policies more in line with converging French and US interests aimed at preventing the Hồ Chí Minh-led government from gaining power in Vietnam. By 1950, Phibun had disavowed all claims to the very Lao and Cambodian territories for which he had committed troops a decade earlier. He also bowed to French and US pressure to suppress Viet Minh activity in Thailand and stem the flow of arms coming from and through Thailand to the Vietnamese resistance.\footnote{See: 'Premier States Indochinese Border Issue Now Closed,' \textit{BP}, 27 May 1948 and US, DOS, 484A.008/5-1150, \textit{The Ambassador in Thailand (Stanton) to the Secretary of State}, 11 May 1950 in \textit{FRUS} (1950, Volume VI), pp. 92-93; US, DOS, 492.00234/5-1150, \textit{The Acting Secretary of State to the Embassy in Thailand}, 23 May 1950 in \textit{FRUS} (1950, Volume VI), pp. 96-98; and US, DOS, 492.00234/6-1750, \textit{The Ambassador in Thailand (Stanton) to the Secretary of State}, 17 June 1950 in \textit{FRUS} (1950, Volume VI), p. 102.} More damaging still, in 1950 Phibun launched a severe crack-down on Vietnamese activities in Thailand, a policy which eventually resulted in the repatriation of thousands of Vietnamese from northeast Thailand to southern Thailand and eventually back to the DRV in the late 1950s.\footnote{The details of the Thai suppression of the Vietnamese in the 1950s is a separate topic, outside of the scope of this thesis, but deserving of serious investigation. More details can be found in Lê Mạnh Trinh, \textit{CVDCQ}; Wichan Champisi, \textit{Yuan Opphayop . . . op. cit.}; and Peter A. Poole, \textit{The Vietnamese in Thailand . . . op. cit.}} Lastly, the return to power of Phibun Songkhram saw the demise of the influence of the Seri Thai, many of its leaders having been long-standing DRV supporters. No where could this be seen better than in March 1949, when the mysterious deaths of Thawi Udon, Chamlong Daoruang, and Thongin Phuriphat at the hands of the Thai police saw three of the DRV's strongest Thai supporters eliminated in one stroke. A few years later, Tiang Serikhun mysteriously "disappeared," never to be seen again. In the meantime, the Viet Minh's staunchest backer, Pridi Phanomyong, had gone into exile in China following a failed attempt to overthrow the Phibun-led government.

Phibun's determination to recognise the Bảo Đại government, one which was remarkably similar to his own in terms of its political rehabilitation, marked the end of Thai sympathy for Vietnamese resistance work on Thai soil. Although this decision was strongly opposed by a range of Thai statesmen and caused a deep split within his own cabinet, on 28 February 1950 Phibun emerged victorious as Thailand became the first
Asian state to recognise Bảo Đại.76 And in a further showing of his anti-communist credentials, a few months later Phibun offered ground troops to the UN in support of US-led forces in Korea.

DRV officials in Bangkok did their best to counter attempts by the Bảo Đại regime to garner international recognition. In one instance, Phibun was informed that a message had been sent to the Minister of Foreign Affairs from Hồ Chí Minh addressed to various governments of Southeast Asia arguing that DRV was "the only legal government" and asking to establish diplomatic relations with any government which respects the rights of equality.77 In another case, the Prime Minister's office had received twenty four petitions from overseas Vietnamese in Thailand concerning Thai moves toward recognising Bảo Đại.78 On 1 September, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs made an announcement saying that the recognition of the Vietnamese government in Saigon "does not extend to individual leaders in the government, but rather is a recognition of the government which the French have allowed to be formed . . ."79 According to a communication from the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Secretary of the Prime Minister, this response was made to allay domestic Vietnamese critics of Thailand's recognition of Bảo Đại. However, at the same time, the government decided to act more stridently against those Vietnamese who openly supported Hồ Chí Minh.80

Sometime after the Thai recognition of Bảo Đại, a Cadillac carrying the powerful Chief of Police, Phao Sirayanon, pulled up to the kerb in front of the National Assembly where Quy was standing. Quy was told to get inside, where Phao informed him that he would have to leave Thailand—he was to be deported. Shortly thereafter, Quy packed his bags and, along with six other members of the delegation, left Thailand for Rangoon.81 While Vietnamese activities in Thailand would not be eradicated entirely during the decades that followed, Quy's deportation from Thailand symbolised the effective end of the western front and the importance of Thailand to the Vietnamese resistance against the French. By

76 The Thai cabinet split over Thai recognition of Bảo Đại, with the Thai Foreign Minister, Pote Sarasin, resigning in opposition. For a fairly helpful, inside Thai account of the Bảo Đại problem, see: Khonthi, op. cit., pp. 451-60.
77 TNA, ft.1.0201.37.6/Folder 11.1, 'Minister of Foreign Affairs to Prime Minister,' 26 January 1950.
78 TNA, ft.1.0201.37.6/Folder 11.1, 'Secretary of Prime Minister's Office to Assistant Director of Police,' 31 July 1950. These petitions were no doubt written at the behest of Vietnamese activists working in Thailand.
79 TNA, ft.1.0201.37.6/Folder 11.1, 'Announcement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,' 1 September 1950.
80 TNA, ft.1.0201.37.6/Folder 11, 'Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Secretary of Prime Minister,' 18 September 1950. Interestingly, on 19 October 1950, the Secretary of the National Security Council informed the Secretary of the Prime Minister's Office that Hồ Chí Minh's forces were well organised, widely supported, and may defeat the French. Such an eventuality, it was stated, may cause local Vietnamese to oppose the Thai government. TNA, ft.1.0201.37.6/Folder 11.1, 'Secretary of the National Security Council to Secretary of the Prime Minister's Office, 19 October 1950. For more information concerning this fear, see: Konthi, op. cit., p. 451.
81 Interview with Nguyễn Đức Quy, 5 April 1989, Ho Chi Minh City and TNA, ft.1.0201.37.6/Folder 11.1, 'Director of Police to Prime Minister,' 5 July 1951. Quy's home was near the Assembly.
this time, the Vietnamese had already shifted their attention to the north as the victory of the Chinese Communists opened key northern rear areas and provided large amounts of military aid. In Peking in January 1950, Hồ Chí Minh and Hoàng Văn Hoan met to discuss the rapidly changing strategic environment. After having heard Hoan report on the deteriorating conditions in Thailand, Hồ told Hoan that with the Chinese now aiding the Vietnamese resistance, priorities would now be shifted from Thailand to China.82

82 Hoàng Văn Hoan, op. cit., p. 327. Many of the cadres who had worked in Thailand were soon moved to China. Ibid., p. 331.
Conclusion

In this study, we have traced the development of Vietnamese resistance activities in Thailand from 1885 to 1949. Although Thailand's relative importance to the Vietnamese resistance movement did not increase at a constant rate throughout this period, but rather fluctuated in response to several factors, it has been shown that there was an overall increase in its strategic significance to the Vietnamese struggle against the French. This was most notable in the immediate post-WWII period. Since there are no alternative studies examining this topic against which we can compare the present work, let us conclude briefly by considering a few of the major themes which have emerged from our discussion in the previous six chapters.

A number of factors combined to make Thailand an attractive rear base to the Vietnamese resistance during the period under study. Most importantly, because Thailand was geographically close to Vietnam but simultaneously positioned just outside the direct French colonial reach, it could act as an effective western rearguard for the Vietnamese resistance. An added inducement was the large number of overseas Vietnamese residing in Thailand, in the northeastern part in particular. Thirdly, having been forced by the French to abandon claims to large tracts of territory in Laos and Cambodia, Bangkok shared the Vietnamese antipathy for French colonialism, a factor that worked in the Vietnamese favour at key points during the anticolonial movement. This can be seen in the permission the Thai royal family gave to scholar-patriots to reside in Ban Tham at the turn of the century; the backing northeastern Thai authorities gave to Vietnamese efforts to build their own hamlets and schools in the 1920s; Bangkok's favourable policy changes toward the Vietnamese resistance during the Franco-Thai war; and the large-scale military and diplomatic support which the DRV received from Thai civilian and military officials in the wake of WWII.

This thesis has also shown that there was a linkage between anticolonial programmes in northeastern Thailand and those in southern China from 1885 to 1949. Although Vietnamese resistance activities in southern China took long-term precedence over those in Thailand, evidence has been presented in this study demonstrating that there were certain periods when Thailand assumed a more important role. This occurred when Vietnamese resistance projects in China could no longer operate effectively, forcing anticolonial leaders to shift their attention to Thailand, the only other rear area available on
the outskirts of Indochina. This was the case in the late 1880s when Phan Đình Phùng sent partisans to Thailand to seek aid. Choosing again between China and Thailand in 1908, Phan Bội Châu subsequently went to Bangkok three times. It was after learning of the 1911 Chinese Revolution that Châu left Thailand for southern China to set up the Quang Phúc Hội. However, realising the continued importance of Thailand’s geographic position, he immediately sent cadres there to establish subsidiary branches. Little over a decade later, Hồ Chí Minh followed in this pattern when, after forming the Thanh Niên in Canton in 1925, he dispatched adherents to Thailand to set up subsidiaries organisations there. A few years later Hồ himself arrived in Thailand, symbolising the increased importance of Thailand to the Vietnamese resistance in the wake of the violent break between the Chinese Nationalists and Communists in 1927. Thailand remained a key rearguard to Vietnamese communists when they set up the Indo-Chinese Assistance Section in bases in northeast Thailand in the early 1930s to serve as recovery and training centres for cadres fleeing the French repression of the Soviet Nghê-Tinh uprisings. Lastly, with Chiang Kaishek making it much harder for the Vietnamese to work out of southern China as war engulfed Indochina after WWII, Thailand assumed unique importance to the DRV as a major source of arms and equipment, a crucial link to the international community, a contact point to Lao and Cambodian resistance groups there, and a close rear base providing training camps and access to the financial resources of the large Vietnamese communities in Thailand. It is in this context that the interplay between Thailand and China became an important component of the Vietnamese resistance against the French during the period under study.

Another benefit deriving from Thailand’s favourable position in relation to Vietnam was the opportunity it afforded Vietnamese revolutionary leaders during the pre-WWII period to set up cadre-training camps relatively safe from French interference. Between 1912 and 1916, Đặng Thúc Héra took advantage of such circumstances to set up small youth camps in Ban Dong, turning this into a policy after WWI. Following in this tradition in the late 1920s, leaders of the Thanh Niên set up a number of Cooperative Associations in Thailand to give revolutionary training to youths sent from Vietnam. During his stay in Thailand, Hồ Chí Minh introduced cadres to the works of Marx and Engels and helped Thanh Niên organisations in Thailand make the change over to communism and presided over formation of the SCP. In the 1930s, more than one Vietnamese communist has referred to bases in northeast Thailand as "Universities" where they received important training and experience among the Thai and overseas Vietnamese communities, the training grounds for these revolutionary laboratories. Consider just a few of the prominent names listed among those who tended to revolutionary work in Thailand in the 1920s and 1930s: Phạm Hồng Thái, Lê Hồng Phong, Lê Tân Anh, Hồ Tùng Mậu, Hồ Chí Minh, Phùng Chí Kiên, former Major
General Hoàng Sâm, Hoàng Văn Hoan, Võ Tùng, Đảng Thái Thuyến, and Lê Mạnh Trinh.

Interestingly, almost all of these individuals came from the northern central Vietnamese provinces of Hà Tĩnh and Nghệ An, both of which are renowned for the large number of famous anticolonialists they have produced since 1885. The fact that the birthplaces of these major resistance figures were located little over 100 kilometres from northeast Thailand and because many of their relatives and friends had fled to Thailand following the destruction of the Cần Vương movement, these individuals were well aware of Thailand's favourable proximity. Indeed, looking back at the strategic thinking of the major Vietnamese resistance leaders active during the period under study, Thailand figured into their anti-French plans in one way or another. This helps to explain why the leadership of Vietnamese resistance programmes in Thailand was dominated by cadres from Nghệ-Tĩnh. Of the major figures responsible for building resistance projects in Thailand during the period prior to WWII, the following were all from these two provinces: Phan Đình Phùng, Trần Hữu Lực, Phan Bội Châu, Đảng Thúc Hứa, Quỳnh Anh, Hồ Tùng Mậu, Hồ Chí Minh, and Hoàng Văn Hoan.

Considered together with the China-Thailand linkage, the dominant Nghệ-Tĩnh component of the Vietnamese resistance leadership in Thailand goes far to accounting for the orientation of Vietnamese programmes in Thailand toward northern Vietnam and southern China during the period prior to WWII. During the early 1920s, Đảng Thúc Hứa predicated his work on constructing better contact with posts in northern Vietnam and China, providing rest-stops to cadres coming from China and Vietnam (i.e. Nghệ-Tĩnh), and setting up a system whereby students could be sent out of Vietnam (again, Nghệ-Tĩnh) to Thailand to study or to await subsequent dispatch to China. Between 1920 and 1925, Hứa set up a network of bases in the northeastern Thai provinces of Nong Khai, Nakhon Phanom, Sakhon Nakhon, and Udon Thani. All of these provinces were sites where the majority of Vietnamese fleeing French colonial expansion into northern central Vietnam in the late 1880s and 1890s had settled and they were also provinces located in upper northeast Thailand, areas parallel to Nghệ-Tĩnh. This linkage between upper northeast Thailand and Nghệ-Tĩnh was evident in the early 1930s, when Vietnamese communists used bases Hứa had set up earlier to support the Indochinese Assistance Section and its task of sheltering cadres fleeing French suppression of the Nghệ-Tĩnh uprisings.

As a corollary, the concentration of these Vietnamese bases in upper northeast Thailand also led Vietnamese organisations there to pay more attention to Laos' strategic importance and less to that of Cambodia. Beginning with the Thanh Niên in the mid-1920s, and then expanded by Hồ Chí Minh in the late 1920s and the communists in the early 1930s, revolutionary bases were set up in major Lao towns along the Thai-Lao
frontier to act as contact points between Vietnamese resistance bases in Thailand and outposts in Vietnam. By the early 1930s, Vietnamese activists had linked Nong Khai to Vientiane, Nakhon Phanom to Thakhek, and Mukdahan to Savannakhet. However, there is no evidence showing anyone connecting Aranyaprathet to the Cambodian border town of Poipet or Chanthaburi to Pailin, suggesting that there was little resistance activity in the lower northeastern Thai provinces bordering Cambodia, such as Ubon or Surin (see map III). Obviously, Laos' geopolitical position between Vietnamese resistance positions in northeast Thailand and posts in Vietnam and southern China made it more important to northern-orientated anticolonialists working in Thailand prior to WWII. And, unlike Laos, Cambodia's main cities were located in the interior, far from potential Thai-based resistance organisations along the northeastern Thai border. This made contact with Vietnamese émigré communities in Cambodia more difficult for Thai-stationed Vietnamese activists than was the case in Laos. From the evidence available, the Vietnamese leadership in Thailand took little interest, if any at all, in building contacts with southern Vietnamese resistance organisations or building bases among Vietnamese nationals in Cambodia (to say nothing of a lack of interest in working with the Cambodians).

This northern orientation had important ramifications in the post-WWII period. As the war came to an end, giving way to a complex series of events discussed in chapter 3, the connexions resistance organisations in Thailand had to the Vietnamese communities in Laos gave the Viet Minh a considerable foothold in Laos—a political base from which to influence events and negotiations and a factor which helped the DRV in enlisting the support of the Overseas Vietnamese and, to a lesser degree, Lao forces in the defence of Vietnam. In this sense, resistance bases in northeast Thailand contributed to protecting Vietnam's western flank. In contrast, the failure of Vietnamese resistance leaders in Thailand to build contact with large overseas Vietnamese communities in Cambodia and their failure to establish any lasting cooperation with the Cambodian resistance groups that had worked out of lower northeast Thailand since 1940 was one reason the Viet Minh were much more isolated from events in Cambodia than they were in Laos at the end of WWII. This is also an important reason for the dispatch to Thailand in early 1946 of southern Viet Minh cadres, such as Nguyễn Thành Sơn and Trần Văn Giâu, who were instructed to build cooperation with the Cambodian resistance groups operating there.

The key to the ability of the Vietnamese to administer to large-scale activities in Thailand after WWII was the support they received from the Thais. Although we have seen that there were certainly periods of Thai suppression, at the outset of the 1940s a growing antipathy for the French saw a range of Thai political camps giving the Vietnamese increasing degrees of support. As we have shown, this widening assistance
was a function of weakening French power in the wake of the outbreak of WWII. Following the fall of France to Germany in June 1940, Thailand relied on Japan to help it regain territories lost to the French decades earlier. One of the products of this was a new view of the Vietnamese resistance on the part of the Phibun-led government, one which sought to gain Vietnamese support of the Thai case against the French. It was in this context that Phibun met with Vũ Hưu Binh and relaxed regulations of the Vietnamese in Thailand, contributing to a small, though important, revitalisation of Vietnamese activities in Thailand. A more important relationship developed, however, at the end of the Pacific War, when Viet Minh cadres in Thailand joined their Seri Thai counterparts in guerilla operations against the Japanese. While this cooperation was short-lived and very limited, it nevertheless was an extremely important link that laid the foundation for the close degree of cooperation that emerged in the immediate postwar period between DRV representatives in Thailand and Seri Thai leaders now assuming top leadership posts in Thai government. Without the support of such key figures as Pridi Phanomyong, Tiang Serikhan, Thongin Phuriphat, or Chamlong Daoruang, the Vietnamese would certainly have found their ability to supply the Vietnamese war effort much more difficult during the crucial period between 1945 and 1949.

During this same period we have seen that the complex strategic climate created by the Allied division of Indochina along the 16th parallel directly effected the development of postwar Vietnamese activities in Thailand in several important ways. The French reoccupation of southern Vietnam and all of Cambodia during the last half of 1945 left southern Viet Minh leaders looking to Thailand as their only major source of arms and rearguard safe from the French. The outbreak of hostilities in southern Vietnam, over a year before full-scale war broke out in the north, accounts for the unprecedented level of southern Vietnamese participation in resistance activities in Thailand in 1946. Throughout this year, ranking southerners working in Thailand presided over stepped up cooperation with Cambodian resistance groups operating there, procured a large amount of arms and equipment, and recruited and outfitted combat units, such as the Mekong I-IV, Quang Trung, and Trần Phú forces, to take these arms back and to fight the French. These groups worked along secret routes originating from bases along the lower northeastern Thai-Cambodian border and running across Cambodia and the Gulf of Siam to end points in southern Vietnam. This postwar southern track in the Vietnamese resistance targetted, for what appears to be the first time in the history of Vietnamese resistance work in Thailand, overseas Vietnamese communities in Cambodia and resistance posts in eastern Thailand, the Thai-held Cambodian territories, and western Cambodia.

Meanwhile, the pre-WWII northern track in Thai-based activities did not remain static after WWII, especially as the strategic climate in northern Indochina began to change in
early 1946. The first major change came after the 28 February Franco-Sino and 6 March Accords, when the French reoccupied all of Laos and sent the Viet Minh's military operations in Laos, as well as 50,000 mainly Vietnamese refugees, fleeing into Nakhon Phanom and Nong Khai provinces. With a go-ahead from the Thais, the Viet Minh continued administering military operations from bases along the northeastern Thai-Lao border.

The importance of all these operations increased markedly after the outbreak of full-scale war in Indochina in December 1946. This was symbolised best by the formation of the Western Front, a Vietnamese military zone that ran along both sides of the Mekong from upper Laos down to northwestern Cambodia. In effect, the Western Front reached southwards just far enough to link up with the southern operation of the Mekong I-IV, Quang Trung, and Trần Phú operations, thereby forming a continuous line of Vietnamese resistance bases extending down the length of the northeastern Thai frontier. With full-access to bases in southern China and large-scale military aid from the Chinese Communists not available to the Vietnamese until late 1949 at the earliest, this long string of Vietnamese bases linked to corresponding points in Vietnam pointed up the fact that Thailand held an important strategic position in the Vietnamese resistance against the French.

Looking back at the violence that has engulfed Indochina for over half a century, it seems that while different actors have come and gone, one constant has been the geographic importance of Thailand in relation to the wars that have plagued Indochina for so many decades. Though the Vietnamese may have been the first to recognise the strategic importance of Thailand in relation to Vietnam and war in Indochina, they were certainly not the last. It should not come as such a surprise now to recall that US Ambassador Leonard Unger described Thailand's "exceeding importance" to the US in relation to the Vietnam War in much the same words that Hoàng Văn Hoan explained Thailand's significance to the Vietnamese in an address to cadres in Udon in 1948. Indeed, as Vietnamese troops poured into Cambodia in late 1978 and early 1979, ranking Khmer Rouge leaders must have been thinking in very similar terms when they crossed into Thailand and began operations against the Vietnamese army from some of the same areas in northeastern Thailand that the Vietnamese had first used as rearbases decades earlier.
Appendix I

A Love of Community Ballad (Ca Af Đơn)

By: Phan Bội Châu

Our love should turn toward our community
Let someone sing a song to express this feeling.
Without a community we are like swallows pierced by arrows,
An abandoned nation, frightened in the storm.
With a community we can now gather together.
But how must our love be for each other?
The community is like an inseparable body,
Despite five continents and four seas we remember each other.
Separated we cannot live,
Gathered together we are strong and prosperous.
There must be love of nation in our community,
Be of one heart, I ask you not to go separate ways.
Appendix II

[Untitled Poem by an overseas Vietnamese in Siam]

The five continents are darkened in chaos of red dust,
Like birds frightened in a storm, so are the Vietnamese people.
Because our houses have been destroyed, we have a common enemy.
Yet as guests in a foreign country, we must expose ourselves.
Often we were on the slopes and in the passes of mountains.
Snow and fog encase our tents, our company: the trees and grass.
Bitterness I consider to be as sweet as sugar.

Just as mountains are made of stones, so are our hearts loyal.
Our swords and bows wait, our hammers and hatchets the same.
We wipe sweat from our heads, laughing as we look at each other.
While the mountains exist, there is a country, debts to life, and we still have to make sacrifices.

Late at night together we share the shadow of the lamp.
We made promises that we would fight together.
Looking towards my home, I see vast silvery clouds of one colour.
I miss my people, thinking of my compatriots, I become sorrowful.

We should think of how to unite the people firmly,
Wait until the people are spirited, the organisation stable.
Raise the flag high as we lead the people forward,
Take the lead, stand in front, with the youth taking the initiative for the nation.

Oh God in Heaven how could you do this to your people?
I wander through a sad rain and a mournful wind in a foreign land.

I tried to carry the country, but the pole broke at mid-way,
We are marching forward but it is a pity I have to hurry to say goodbye.

Now I will sleep a hundred years.
My revenge and debts to the nation I leave it to you brothers.
Someday we will pay for good deeds and debts.¹

¹ This poem can be found in Lê Mạnh Trinh, CVDCQ, p. 88. The writer of this poem was a member of a cooperative team who died from sickness in the forest outside of Sakhon Nakhon in 1928.
Appendix III

Letter to the Central Committee of the Siamese Communist Party from a Delegate of the First Congress of the Indochinese Party, 31 March 1935.²

Comrades!

As the delegate at the First Party Congress of the Indochinese Communist Party and on behalf of class proletarianism and all the working classes and the working peoples in the Indochina region, I send ardent communist greetings to the Siamese Communist Party, the vanguard of the Siamese proletarian class, and the people who are organising and leading the revolutionary struggle of the Siamese working masses to throw off the yoke of imperialist domination and the native militaristic feudalists. We ask that the Siamese Communist Party lead the revolutionary struggle of the Siamese working masses enthusiastically and develop it fully.

The revolutionary activities in every region are a part of the world revolution. All are class brothers in the capitalist, colonial, and semi-colonial regions. You have our warmest support in the revolutionary struggle of the courageous worker-peasants and among the working Siamese masses.

Indochina and Siam are two neighbouring regions. This local revolution is intimately linked and influenced by the regional revolution there; so there should be ever more fraternal links between the Indochinese Communist Party and the Siamese Party. The revolutionary activities in every region are a part of the world revolution. All are class brothers in capitalist regions, colonial, and semi-colonial regions. You have our warmest support in the revolutionary struggle of the courageous worker-peasant and among the working Siamese masses.

During the time of the creation of the Indochinese Communist Party you gave your utmost to help our Party in all aspects. Our Congress recognises these actions of the

Siamese Communist Party, which were truly in the spirit of revolutionary internationalism and correctly followed the principles of the Comintern. Our Congress is sure that the Siamese Communist Party will often help our Party, and will bring the Siamese working masses to struggle and support the Indochinese revolution.

Our Congress pledges that our Party will do everything in its power to help the Siamese Communist Party and appeal to the generosity of all the Indochinese working masses to struggle and support the Siamese revolution.

Long live the Siamese revolution!

Long live the Siamese Communist Party!

Oppressed masses in Indochina and Siam unite!

[signed] The Delegate of the First congress of the Indochinese Party,
31 March 1935
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Far Eastern Economic Review
Liberty [Thailand]
Le Monde
Manila Times
Statesman [New Delhi]
Straits Times
The Malaya Tribune
Vietnam News Service [DRV]

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Khro Lek [Iron Armour]
Mahachon [The Masses]
Nakhon San [City Paper]*
Prachakon [The People]*
Prachamit [Friend of the People]
Si Krung*
Suphap Burut [Gentleman]
Suwannaphum [Golden Land]*
Thai Mai [New Thailand]*

* The articles cited from these newspapers were translated into English and reproduced in US, DOS, 892.9111/7-847, 'Extracts from local Newspapers, Siam, for the Week June 15-June 21, 1947, USNA.

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Cô gái Phong (Liberation Flag)
Cựu Quốc (National Salvation)
Dân Chู้ (Democracy)
Dân Quốc (Nation)
Dân Thanh (People's Opinion)
Kháng Chiến (Resistance)
Nhận Dân (People's Daily)
Tự Do (Freedom)
Tiếng Dân (Voice of the People)
Độc Lập (Independence)
Sir Thái (The Truth)
Sinh Hoạt Nội Bộ (Internal Life)
Thống Nhất (Unity)