



CHAPTER III

CONDITIONS OF ADAPTATION

A summary of the three Pillars making up modern Thai society is Nation, Religion, and the King (*Chat, Satsana, Pramahakasat*). This triad of institutions mutually reciprocates and cultivates Thai society. In his doctoral dissertation, Richard Allan O'Connor¹ describes that the modern concept of Nation corresponds to the community of the *muang* in the T'ai tradition; Religion in Thai society is, of course, Buddhism, and the King, in the Thai indigenous concept, is the father, as *Pho Khun Ramkamheang* in the Sukhothai period, the leader, the top of the social hierarchy, is called in Thai language “*Pra chao Ju hua*” (พระเจ้าอยู่หัว), “*Phra chao pendin*” (พระเจ้าแผ่นดิน) which means the owner who is on the top or above the head of the people.

If the word “*muang*” in T'ai tradition refers to the community which composes social groupings, then the word “*Ban*,” both as village and household, might be considered the social units forming *muang*. Historically, since the Ayutthaya period, the administration in Ayutthaya was divided into small *ban*, known in western language as “camp” such as Ban Cochin China, and Ban Portuguese. Until the beginning of the Bangkok period, many “*ban*,” such as *Ban Mo* (The Pot Village), *Ban Yuon* (The Vietnamese Village), *Ban Mon* (The Mon Village), *Ban Khamen* (The Khmer Village), *Ban Khek* (The Indian Village), were found in the capital city. *Ban*, in Thai tradition, consisted of people and families living under the rule of the leader (Father King as in the Sukhothai period), the Big Father (*Pho Yai Ban*) in a present day Thai village. When people form a *Ban*, at a certain point, it requires a social community center. Thus, each *Ban* “*built and supported a temple* (of their religion). *The shared merit of their deeds bound them together just as rituals and social*

¹ Richard Allan O'Connor, “*Urbanism and Religion: Community, Hierarchy and Sanctity in Urban Thai Buddhist Temples*,” Cornell Dissertation, 1978.

*relations make Ban and Muang morally real.*² Consequently, each *Ban* in Thai society in the past had its own temple such as: Wat Yuon Bang Po (The Vietnamese Buddhist temple of Bang Po), Wat Mon (The Mon Temple), or even the King's *Ban* in early Bangkok had the Emerald Buddha Temple serve as the family's wat and the palladium of the society.³ The temple, in return, functions as the moral center of the social community of the *Ban*. Villagers believe that monks are like sanctified bridges linking the lay society to god's world or the Buddhist world. Individual merit gain is based on merit that he or she has done for the temple. Thus, in this account, temples serve the community as a moral center. As the conceptual center, Prince Damrong Rachanuphap noticed that the "village and wat often had the same name."⁴ The temple was likely named after the name of the village where it was found. For example, most Vietnamese temples in Bangkok – although having Vietnamese names – were called by Thai people as Wat Yuon (as in Wat Yuon Talat Noi, Wat Yuon Saphan Khao, and Wat Yuon Bang Po); or in the case of Wat Bangkhunphrom in Bangkhumphrom area and Wat Intharawihan (this wat was later changed to Wat Intharam then to Wat In). Whereas society in the past was limited to people living in villages, temples also traditionally served as public areas such as the village school, library and meeting place.

Therefore, the mutual reciprocation between *Ban*, as the community, and the temple, as the religious center in Thai society, is undeniable. Community came first, and then religion followed. Community is considered the environment of religion. Community supports religion; religion, as the spiritual center of the community, fosters and strengthens that community. Then, when the Vietnamese immigrants in early Bangkok formed up their *Ban* (social unit, social grouping) and developed it at certain point, they needed a spiritual center, as such, Vietnamese temples were established.

² Ibid., p 84.

³ Ibid., p 91.

⁴ Damrong Rachanuphap, *มูลเหตุแห่งการสร้างวัดในประเทศไทย*, กรมศิลปากร, กรุงเทพฯ. [*The Background of Wat Construction in Siam*], Fine Arts Department, Bangkok, 1961, p 34-35.

Looking at the development of Annam-nikai, at the beginning, the establishment of Vietnamese temples was to serve the small *Ban* of Vietnamese immigrants. Later, their temples became widely known, arousing the interest of other *Ban*, namely the Chinese community. Especially after receiving special interest from the King of Thailand, temples of the Vietnamese extended their support base into the Thai community. Thus, Annam-nikai temples no longer served only the Vietnamese *Ban*, but other social groupings, namely the Chinese and Thai. When the community of the temple's supporters was extended to other social groupings, its new environment changed to the community of different social groupings within Thai society.

Society has been and always will be in an ongoing process of change; people, as part of society, are also in an ongoing process of coping with the changing society. When society changes people change. The environment for Annam-nikai changed, Annam-nikai needed to change its structure, function, and behavior to exist in its changing environment. This process is called **adaptation**.

Obviously, the main reason leading to the adaptation of Annam-nikai is the change of its environment: the temple's community. The change of its temple's community is continuing. Throughout its historical development, the main support group of Annam-nikai has changed from the Vietnamese community to the Chinese and Thai communities. At present, the Chinese community plays an important role in providing material support to the temples. With 75 percent of the temple's followers,⁵ they are also the bulk of the temple's attendants. The Thai community - comprising Thai Royalty and laymen - though not numerous in temple followers, plays an indispensable factor to the existence of Annam-nikai, especially the constant support from the Thai Royal Court. Thus, in order to study the process of change in Annam-nikai's community, two lines of investigation are examined in this chapter: the replacement of the Chinese and the support of Thai Royalty.

⁵ See result of the questionnaire No 1 in appendices.

3.1. Replacement of Vietnamese Buddhists by Chinese

The replacement of the Buddhist Chinese in Annam-nikai temples, as stated earlier, is a gradual process. In the beginning, the Chinese in Bangkok did not support Annam-nikai temples directly, however the similarities in culture between the two countries reduced feelings of alienation in regards to the practices of Annam-nikai. These similarities also caught the attention of some Chinese people. Later, when this Buddhist sect became better known in Thai society, especially after the interest and support of Thai Royalty, it became hard to ignore, drawing both Thai and Chinese to the temples. But, the most important period was from post WWII to the end of Vietnam War, when the political situation in Thailand and the region influenced policy. The policy became suppressive. The Thai government's strict policy towards Vietnam and communism during this period is the vital factor leading to the integration of the Vietnamese in Bangkok, resulting in the absence of Vietnamese supporters in Annam-nikai temples. The absence of the Vietnamese in Annam-nikai temples after the Vietnam War led to the replacement of Vietnamese with Buddhist Chinese. Therefore, in this part, besides outlining the process of replacement of the Chinese in Annam-nikai temples, the study of the impact of Thai policy towards the Vietnamese is needed to explain the impetus for the replacement. In addition, cultural similarities between Vietnam and Thailand as well as between Vietnam and China are also examined as part of the explanation for the easy acceptance of the Chinese to Annam-nikai and of the Vietnamese into Thai society.

3.1.1. Process of Replacement

Through the historical development of Annam-nikai, it can be seen that the change in the support community of Annam-nikai is not an overnight change. It is a process of gradual replacement. The Vietnamese temples in Thailand were originally established by Vietnamese people and used to serve

the spiritual life of Vietnamese immigrants in Bangkok. The community of temple's supporters was the Buddhist Vietnamese. Monks in Annam-nikai were only Vietnamese ordained in Vietnam. However, during the early period of its development, Annam-nikai received interest from Chinese Buddhists as well. But this interest evolved on limited scale within a small group of Chinese who already had close relations with the Vietnamese community. In the second period, the Annam–Siamese wrestling over Laos and Cambodia interrupted relations between the Vietnamese in the two countries leading to the discontinuation of monks coming from Vietnam. Nevertheless, newly ordained monks in Annam-nikai were still Vietnamese immigrants living in Siam. During this second period, Annamese temples were gaining popularity within the Chinese community, but the temple's main community was still the Vietnamese. Also at this time, the practice of Mahayana monks, especially the Venerable Chân Hung, caught the interest of Prince Mongkut. This special interest of Prince Mongkut led to the important change in the development of Annam-nikai in Thailand during the following period.

The third period from the reign of King Rama IV to WWII saw some marked changes in the history of Annam-nikai. Of special note was the support King Monkut (Rama IV). After ascending to the throne, King Mongkut began to support Annamese temple in terms of material. Under King Rama IV's support, the Khánh Vân Temple (Wat Upai Ratchabumrung) was enlarged and rebuilt.⁶ Moreover, due to the small Vietnamese community in comparison to the Chinese community, the Vietnamese in Bangkok lived a relatively closed lifestyle. Thus, despite being the temple's main community, most repair and upkeep jobs were transferred to Chinese hands. For example, the rebuilding of Upai Ratchabumrung Temple during the reign of King Rama IV was done by a Chinese merchant named Chun,⁷ marking a step up of the involvement of the Chinese into temple business. Especially, upon the recognition of Annam-nikai into Thai Sangha, this Buddhist sect began to be known and learnt widely

⁶ Upai Ratchabumrung, 2000, p6.

⁷ Ibid., p7.

beyond the Vietnamese community exciting more interest in the Chinese and Thai communities, drawing them to its temples. As a result, newly-built temples of this period were established under the support of both the Chinese and the Vietnamese, especially the Chinese.⁸ That is why all four new temples of this period were built in a concentrated area in Chinatown, though this area was not the living place of the Old Vietnamese.

To the end of this period, the flow of the immigrants from Vietnam to Siam continued. Some of them later moved to Bangkok. But most of those immigrants lived along the Northeast border. These newcomers continued to support Vietnamese temples. Although the arrival of the Vietnamese in Bangkok was continuous, in comparison to the Chinese, it was still a modest number. Moreover, due to new settlements, the newcomers, economically, were not strong. They had to be busy in earning their living. The Old Chinese, who had been settled for a long time in Bangkok, in contrast, mostly had a stable economic status. Additionally, up to the early part of the 20th century, the Old Vietnamese who came to Bangkok gradually adapted into Thai society. Many of them had good status receiving high positions in Thai society. Their children were married to Thais and Chinese family. These Old Vietnamese still kept supporting the temples but their support level decreased. According to information from Khun Ying Ya in the previous chapter, the Old Vietnamese like her grandmother still went to Vietnamese temples during the 1920s. But they preferred to go to temples where Vietnamese monks stayed, particularly old temples from their ancestor's time like Quảng Phước Temple (Wat Annamnikairam), or Cảnh Phước Temple (Wat Samanam Boriharn). In other temples, namely Phở Phước (Kusolsamakhorn) and Khánh Vân (Upai Ratchabumrung) temples, the Chinese were often seen.⁹ Beginning with paying respect to Vietnamese monks, the Chinese contributed devoutly to Annam-nikai. Devout Chinese sent their children to be students of Vietnamese monks. Some of these children were later ordained in Annam-nikai like Master Phở Liên (the

⁸ Like the case of Wat Kusolsamakhorn (Phở Phước temple).

⁹ Personal interview with Khun Ying Ya who has the family name Bunnag.

9th Chief Abbot of Annam-nikai). So when the Chinese support increased, monks of Chinese origin began to be found in temples; the temples had to respond to this new supporter's group. Then, the division in the temple's community came.

Nevertheless, this division in the temple's community did not happen in all Annam-nikai temples. The Vietnamese still attended old temples such as Cảnh Phước (Samanam Boriharn) and Quảng Phước (Annamnikairam), and new temple like Từ Tế Temple (Wat Lokanukro) for in these temples Vietnamese monks were still to be found.¹⁰ This period is considered the origin of the replacement process which leads to a transitional period.

The post WWII period witnessed many changes in Annam-nikai. At the beginning of this period, both the Old and New Vietnamese still attended Annam-nikai temples. By the end of the Vietnam War, they were seldom seen. However, not all temples were central places for the Vietnamese people in Bangkok. The Vietnamese preferred to go to temples where there were Vietnamese monks or monks who could speak Vietnamese, such as Từ Tế Temple (Wat Lokanukro) and Cảnh Phước Temple (Wat SamanamBoriharn). Other Vietnamese temples, where Vietnamese monks were absent, they rarely attended. The number of the Vietnamese attending temples decreased in relative proportion to the decrease in Vietnamese monks in Annam-nikai temples. By the end of this period, monks of Vietnamese origin were no longer found in the temples. In the meantime, the Chinese, continuing the tradition from the last period, regularly supported the temples becoming the majority of the temple's community. This new group of temple supporters is not restricted to the capital city, but expanded to the provinces. Consequently, Annam-nikai temples in this last period were all built under donations and support from the Chinese-Thai community.

A survey done from 2004-2006 with 200 people who came to Annam-nikai temples during major ceremonies such as Star Worshipping Day and

¹⁰ Interview on December 4, 2004 with Mrs. Nga, an old Vietnamese woman who followed her parent to Bangkok since 1919.

Thanh Minh Day (or *Cheng Meng* in Tea Chiew pronunciation, which means Graves Honor Day). The survey showed 75% claimed themselves Chinese-Thai, 15% Thai, and only 10% Vietnamese-Thai.¹¹

The turning point of this change can be seen during the last period. Together with the immense influx of Vietnamese into Thailand, which occurred from 1945-1946 and periodically after the Vietnam War ended in 1975, the Vietnamese Buddhist community in Bangkok has gradually lost its relationship with the Vietnamese temples as well as its density and unity. This loss led to the absence of the Vietnamese Buddhists and their replacement by the Chinese in Annam-nikai temples.

3.1.2. Thai Politics and Policies Concerning Vietnamese

As mentioned in chapter II, the Vietnamese in Thailand are divided into two groups: Old Vietnamese refers to those who came to Thailand before World War II, while New Vietnamese or Vietnamese Refugees refers to the group of Vietnamese who came to Thailand between the end of World War II and the end of the Vietnam War in 1975.

Before the influx of refugees from Indochina between 1945 and 1946, the Vietnamese in Thailand received favorable treatment from the Thai government. This treatment continued until the government of Pridi Banomyong. Pridi exhibited sympathy towards revolutionaries from colonized countries. Due to Pridi's sympathetic views, the policy of the Pridi government towards the Vietnamese refugees was generally favorable. The Vietnamese refugees could settle freely within the Kingdom. Moreover, they were granted land for farming and initial funds for a new life in Siam.¹²

After a coup in November 1947, the absolute military regime of Phibul Songkhram came into power. Additionally, the post World War II political field was distinctly divided into two sides: the communist side with the Soviet

¹¹ The survey was carried out from January 2005 to February 2006 by the author with 200 people at Annam-nikai temples by distributing questionnaires and personal interviews.

¹² Thanawan Boonwanna, *The Policy of the Phibul Songkhram Regime Regarding Vietnamese Refugees in Thailand, 1948-1957*, (M.A Thesis) Chulalongkorn University, 2002, p 48.

Union and China as the leaders, and the capitalists led by The United States on the other side. As a communist government, the Ho Chi Minh government received both political and financial support from China and the Soviet Union. The recognition of the Viet Minh government of Ho Chi Minh by the Chinese and Soviets was perceived as a threat to the spread of communism southward through Indochina and probably into Thailand. The United States, after convincing France to accept the puppet government of Bảo Đại in South Vietnam, as well as the independence of Laos and Cambodia, attempted to build an alliance in SEA by asking Thailand to also accept these governments. By accepting the Bảo Đại government, France and the US thought the people in Southern Vietnam would understand that they were fighting the communist enemy from the North, not foreign occupation. In order to convince the Thai government and to reinforce this understanding, the United States promised an aid package of 75 million baht to develop the Thai economy and protect Thailand from communist expansion. With the agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation, providing economic aid and personnel training to Thailand, on February 28, 1950, Thailand officially accepted the US proposal and recognized the government of Bảo Đại.¹³

The recognition of the Bảo Đại government in South Vietnam indelibly marked Thai policy towards the Vietnamese refugees. Once Thailand established diplomatic relations with the Southern government, it needed a clear-cut negative attitude towards the Ho Chi Minh government. Since most of the refugees were from North Vietnam and pro-Ho Chi Minh Vietnamese nationals, undoubtedly, this attitude would affect the Vietnamese refugees. Upon the establishment of relations with the government of Bảo Đại, the problem of the Vietnamese refugees became a prime issue for the Thai government. This led to the release of many strict policies on refugees from Vietnam.

¹³ Ibid., p 68.

The first restriction targeted the living areas of the refugees. Prior to the recognition of Bảo Đại's government, the Phibun government allowed Vietnamese refugees to live in 19 provinces in the North and Northeastern parts of Thailand. On August 5, 1950, the Thai government reduced their living area down to 8 provinces.¹⁴ Refugees living elsewhere had to move to these 8 Northeastern provinces. Those who resisted this order or organized political activities would be deported.¹⁵ Twelve days later, the Ministry of Interior further limited their living areas to Nongkhai, Nakhornpanom, Ubonratchathani, Sakornakhorn and Prachinburi.¹⁶

Following the restrictive living area policy was a law restricting their travel. Those who wished to leave the restricted area needed to ask permission from the authorities. People caught traveling outside of their living area without permission would be arrested and charged.

In 1952, the worldwide communist movement held great influence in the region; perceiving this movement as a potential threat to Thailand's security, the Thai government re-imposed the Anti-communist Act which entitled the Thai authority "*full power to act against all organizations or individuals who were suspected to be communist-oriented or to have relation with communism.*"¹⁷ With the restoration of the anti-communist act, all secret societies of both the Vietnamese and Chinese people were closed down. Traveling Vietnamese were checked and arrested.

The Geneva Accord on July 1954 divided Vietnam into two parts: the Communist government in the North and Bảo Đại's government in the South.

¹⁴ At the beginning, the Vietnamese refugees were allowed to stay in Chiangrai, Nan, Uttaradit, Loei, Nongkhai, Nakhornpanom, Ubonratchathani, Buriram, Srisaket, Surin, Prachinburi, Trad, Udonthani, Khonken, Mahasarakham, Roiet, Sakornakhorn, Chaiyaphum and Kalasin. Later the Thai government restricted their living area to Nongkhai, Nakhornpanom, Ubonratchathani, Srisaket, Udonthani, Khonken, Sakornakhorn and Prachinburi (Thanawan Boonwanna, 2002, p 80).

¹⁵ Ibid., p 80.

¹⁶ The last announcement on the living area of the Vietnamese refugees from the Ministry of Interior on July 23, 1984, still limited the Vietnamese refugees from the Indochina War to the 10 provinces of Nongkhai, Ubonratchathani, Udonthani, Sakornakhorn, Nakhonpanom, Mukdahan, Yasothorn, Prachinburi, Suratthani and Patthalung. (Thailand Ministry of Interior, *Announcement of Thailand's Ministry of Interior on July 23rd 1984, Re: Restriction on the living area of the Vietnamese refugees*).

¹⁷ Wirachai Naewbunnian, *Policy for Granting Thai Nationality to Third-Generation Vietnamese Refugees*, National Defense College, Bangkok, 1992, p 6.

In the Thai leadership's view, the result of this Accord unwittingly accepted the communist government of Ho Chi Minh in the political world. The pro-Ho Chi Minh refugees in Thailand were thence considered communist. With several thousand Vietnamese refugees living in the country and a much larger number of Red Chinese (communist Chinese),¹⁸ Thailand saw it was impossible to prevent a communist influence in Thai society. Therefore, in order to protect the nation's security, in August 1954, Thailand signed the SEATO pact (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization) with the hope that this treaty would help defend the Kingdom from communist expansion in SEA. As a result of this signing, when the US and other members of SEATO showed their intention to use the army to forcefully halt communist movements in Indochina and asked for cooperation from Thailand, Thailand virtually had no reason to refuse.

In 1965, the American aid in Economic and Technique Training turned into military aid which helped to strengthen the Thai forces and security;¹⁹ Thailand, in return, agreed to let the US troops use her territory as a military base for the Vietnam War. By 1968, 12,000 Thai soldiers were sent to Vietnam battle fields marking the complete involvement of Thailand in the Vietnam War.²⁰

Since Thailand sided with the US in 1950, the Thai policy towards Vietnamese refugees became more severe. Their severity especially increased after re-imposing the anti-communist law, signing the SEATO pact, and the activities of the Vietminh in Indochina reached a high pitch. Thai dailies reported many Vietnamese were arrested and charged as communists.²¹ Prior to this time, the charge for the Vietnamese refugees was mainly leaving the restricted area without permission or having undesirable activities for the

¹⁸ Phibul Songkhram noted in 1948 that there were more than 50,000 communist Chinese living in Thailand. This number was 5,000 as estimated later by both Minister of Interior Phao Sriyanond and Phibul Songkhram in 1954. (William G. Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History*, Cornell University Press, 1962, p 322).

¹⁹ Makata Ma, *Consequences of the Vietnam War on Thai Foreign Policy*, thesis of California State University, 1980, p 12.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p.14.

²¹ *Ibid*, p.15.

nation's security; after signing the SEATO pact, the charge changed to being a communist.

By the 1960s, when communist infiltration was widespread throughout the country, in order to protect Thailand from further communist influence, Thai leaders pushed forward a nationalistic campaign, wishing to build up a strong sense of nationalist sentiment among Thai people. In doing so, a repressive anti-communist policy and an anti-Vietnam campaign were emphasized.

In addition to the law restricting the living area of Vietnamese refugees and the suppressive anti-communist law, it is necessary to mention the law granting Thai nationality to second and third generation Vietnamese. According to Thai law, foreigners from all nations who came to Thailand needed to pay an entrance fee and an annual tax if they stayed permanently in the Kingdom. But, when the Indochina refugees flocked to Thailand, the Thai government viewed their stay as temporary. Therefore, no entrance fee or registration was demanded by the Thai authorities unless a refugee willingly paid it. Consequently, many of the refugees were not registered. Later on, under the anti-communist law, the Thai government had a special policy regarding Vietnamese refugees, particularly the policy in granting Thai nationality for Vietnamese refugees. If prior to 1970, the children from Vietnamese refugee parents who had an "Alien card" could apply for Thai citizenship, but on March 1970, the new regulation of the Ministry of Interior only allowed children whose father or mother was Thai to apply for Thai citizenship. Following this regulation, announcement No 337 on December 13, 1972, of the *Khanapratiwat* (คณะปฏิวัติ) withdrew all Thai nationalities previously granted for children of alien parents. However, this announcement did not include children whose father or mother was a legal alien and a grandchild of Thai-born parents. As a result of this announcement, 26,051 Thai national children born of Vietnamese refugees became children with no nationality.²² This announcement still was in effect until the late 1990s.

²² Wirachai Naewbunnian, p 18-19.

In 1973, with the Paris Peace Accord signed by the US, the Northern government, and the Southern government, the costly War in Vietnam apparently was coming to its end. Shortly after the Peace Accord was signed, the US gradually reduced its military presence in Vietnam as required by one of the articles in the treaty. This withdrawal sent a sign to its Allies to rely on their own power and methods to preserve their nation's security and independence. Additionally, the movements of communists and Thai radical intellectuals and students inside Thailand had reached its peak. The coup d'état in October 1973 divided Thai society into two distinct sides: the extreme rightists with a strong anti-communist ideology, and the leftists comprising communists or pro-communists with a faith in a democratic society.

Finally, after the fall of Saigon to Northern troops in 1975, Vietnam was viewed as an influential communist country in the region. Therefore, when the Thai dictatorial regime of the military government reestablished itself in October 1976, the anti-Vietnam campaign was stressed to strengthen the government's power and protect the country from communism through the suppressing individuals or organizations that were suspected of being communist.

The Thai government policy towards the Vietnamese refugees from 1945 to the end of Vietnam War, as previously discussed, changed according to the political situation of the country and world. The Thai policy, initially, aimed at limiting the living area of the Vietnamese refugees to certain provinces in the Northeast of Thailand. This policy lasted until the government of Field Marshal Pleak Luang Pibul Songkhram sided with the United States; this policy then turned severe and suppressive for refugees who were considered by the Thai authority as pro-Ho Chi Minh or communist-oriented.

3.1.3. Impact of Thai policy on Vietnamese people and temples in Bangkok

As previously studied, post, WWII, Thai law divided the Vietnamese in Thailand into two distinct groups: the Old Vietnamese and the New Vietnamese. But, socially the Buddhist Vietnamese community in Bangkok could be divided into three groups.

First was the Old Vietnamese who came to Thailand before the 19th century. This group, though numerically small due to intermarriage with local people, achieved a certain position in Thai society becoming Thai who fully respected the Thai institutions of Nation, Religion and the King. They had very few, if any, relations with the Vietnamese nation of Hồ Chí Minh. But, some of them still came to the Annam-nikai temples because *“it was a tradition inherited from our grandparents to pay respect to a Buddhist sect which was highly recognized by Thai Royalty in the past.”*²³

The second group consisted of the Vietnamese who came to Thailand when France took Indochina after WWII. They could be considered the Old Vietnamese, and most had legal status. Many of them maintained relationships with their relatives in Vietnam and did not conceal their pro-Ho Chi Minh attitude. Therefore, they were sympathetic towards the Vietnamese refugees and were always helpful to them. People of this second group went to Vietnamese temples because there, they could meet other Vietnamese people and consult Vietnamese monks like Cù Ba and Father Bảo Ân. The third group, copious in number, was made up of people who came to Thailand since 1945 with or without legal status (Alien card). In Thai law, they are refugees or New Vietnamese. They came to Bangkok to earn a living and some also performed activities to help the liberation movement in Vietnam. The reason this group came to Vietnamese temples was, on the one hand, to receive assistance from the temple as well as the community of Old Vietnamese and, on the other hand, to stage political activities such as collecting money from Vietnamese people to

²³ From an interview with one Khun Ying of Vietnamese origin who married an ex high ranking Army officer in 16th August 2005.

send to Vietnam and organizing Vietnamese festivals like National Day, Vietnamese New Year, and Revolutionary Day. Nevertheless, many of them went there for ritual ceremonies as well.

Adding to the group of Indochina refugees, after the fall of Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) in 1975, a great number of Vietnamese from the South escaped to Thailand. They were sent to refugee camps to wait for resettlement in a third country. While waiting in Thailand, many of them escaped from the camps and came to Bangkok.²⁴ Thai newspapers during 1975-1976 reported daily arrests of Vietnamese refugees in Bangkok. Though these new refugees in Bangkok did not join with the Indochina refugee group in terms of forming a community, they are considered as belonging to the 3rd group because of the shared illegal status.

The foregoing study about the Thai policy towards the Vietnamese provides the background of the Thai government's policy. Though this policy seems to be aimed at the Vietnamese refugees living in the Northeastern part of Thailand, it drastically affected the Vietnamese in Bangkok in many aspects.

The farthest reaching Thai policy towards the Vietnamese refugees in Bangkok during this period was the restricted law on their living area. Though the Thai government revised its law on the living area of the Vietnamese during this period, none of these revisions allowed the Vietnamese refugees to live in Bangkok. However, many Vietnamese refugees escaped their restricted area and came to Bangkok. They came to Bangkok simply to seek a better life.²⁵ Thus, by law, their coming to Bangkok was illegal. The illegal status of these

²⁴ On November 21, 1976, the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs officially revealed the number of refugees from Indochina: 79,689, 23,028, and 8,036 (from Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam respectively), totaling 110,753. The number of the refugees accepted by third countries was 34,387 (15,674 Laotians, 11,942 Cambodians and 6,771 Vietnamese). Left behind were a total of 76,366 refugees from Laos (64,015) and Cambodia (11,086). It should be noted that the total number of Vietnamese refugees coming to Thailand up to 1976 was 8,063 of which only 6,771 departed for a third country; the rest (1,292 refugees) were not discussed in the report. (*National Archives Thailand*, no. 2/2519/29/1.5). The most common supposition is that those Vietnamese had escaped from the camp and mingled with Thai society.

²⁵ When the Central Office of Registration for Vietnamese refugees was set up in 1951, the first survey of this office revealed the figure of 45,000 Vietnamese refugees living in all 31 provinces of which only 30,000 had an Alien license. (Thanawan Boonwanna, p 85).

refugees compelled them to go into hiding, causing negative impacts on the life of the refugees as well as the future of their children.

One Vietnamese, who has lived in Bangkok for more than 40 years, recalled her memory of those days:

“Our life in Udonthani was very hard. Thus, we decided to come to Bangkok to seek a better life. People like us, who would like to come to Bangkok at that time, usually had their relative or someone whom they had known before receive them. Those people, however, were members of the local communist cell directly or indirectly. But since most of those people’s status was also illegal in Thai law, thus, they could not help us much except with some initial assistance such as finding a temporary job or a shelter. We had to move around from one place to another because we were afraid of being caught by the Thai authority.”²⁶

Towards the end of the Vietnam War, the refugees, who escaped from their restricted area, coming to Bangkok, increased significantly. In the meantime, the number of the Vietnamese refugees living in controlled areas decreased considerably. Wichian Withyopat, The Head of the District of Thabo (Nongkhai province) disclosed to a reporter of the Daily Time on February 10, 1976, that

“There were about 500 families of Vietnamese refugees in Thabo district. Each family would have at least one new born baby within 3 years from 1973 to 1976(as the birth rate of the Vietnamese refugees was quite high). Thus, multiply this with 500 families, there would be 1,500 new born children of the refugees living in Thabo. But the fact was that there was no registration for the refugee’s new-born children. Those children were sent to Thai families and were registered as Thai national children. Worse

²⁶ From an interview with a Vietnamese woman who came to Bangkok in the late 1960’s, Ba Nga is now living with her husband. She has four children who are all married and live separately. Her children can not speak Vietnamese, but can understand a little. Her grandchildren can not speak nor understand the language of their grandparents.

than that, when the local authority asked the refugees to take a photo in order to make new card for them, we discovered that 100 Vietnamese refugees were missing from the district. This was, because there was a group of Thai people who came to the District Office to make the ID card. When they got the Yellow card (temporary card while waiting for the official one), they sold it to the Vietnamese refugees at prices ranging from 500 baht to 1,000 baht. Those refugees, once they got the yellow card, surely went to Bangkok or other provinces.”²⁷

The case of Thabo, to some extent, tells how the Vietnamese refugees managed to gain legal status and gain Thai citizenship.

Nevertheless, excluding the very few refugees who could manage to have Thai citizenship, most of the Vietnamese refugees who came to Bangkok during this period had no legal status. Thus, they had no right to find a good job, especially an official job.²⁸ According to my survey, the jobs these refugees usually performed were as a small retailer, dressmaker, or labor employee in a Thai or Chinese shop.

In regards to the refugee’s education, due to their illegal status, they were not allowed to open their own private schools. As a result, their children were educated mainly by small classes at the elementary level organized among themselves for a short period of two to three years.²⁹ Later, when the government of Phibul Songkham ended in 1957, refugee parents in Bangkok could send their children to Thai primary school. But most of the parents preferred to send their children to temple schools because they believed that the regulations in temple schools were less strict than in government schools.³⁰ These schools, however, could only provide a basic education up to grade 4 or grade 6. The consequences of the Thai policy of this period put Vietnamese refugees at a great disadvantage. The Vietnamese refugees during this period,

²⁷ National Archives Thailand, n/12/2529/29 14.

²⁸ Peter A. Pool, *Can Thailand's Vietnamese Refugees be Assimilated?*, p 14-15.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p 11-12.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p 13.

as a result, received little education in either Thai or Vietnamese. The percentage of the refugee's children who went to high school was only 1% in Thailand.³¹ The illiteracy of the generation from 1954-1974 was a disadvantage which has influenced their life. Realizing the importance of education for their children's future, the refugee's parents sought out higher education for their children, which were accredited by the Thai government, no matter what the cost. In order to have all the required documents to attend Thai school and university, such as a birth certificate, house registration, and especially Thai nationality, some of them had their own children adopted by a Thai or Chinese family.³² Those children, after graduating from Thai school and university, received work in private and government organizations with some even becoming high-ranking government officials. But, because they concealed the truth of their origins from the beginning, they continue to hide their Vietnamese origin, pretending not to have any relation with their compatriots.³³ Since they went to Thai schools and received a Thai education, the children of the second generation behaved like Thai and spoke Thai better than their mother language.

The other group of refugee children, who were not adopted by a Chinese or Thai family, experienced a harsh daily life. Their experience was different from the Vietnamese in Northeastern Thailand, where the refugees lived in their restricted area, had their own community and could openly express themselves as Vietnamese; the refugee's children in Bangkok, due to their illegal status, had to conceal their Vietnamese nationality. Moreover, in the Northeast, education was taught amongst themselves by Vietnamese teachers.³⁴ Thus, the percentage of Vietnamese-language capacity of those Vietnamese children is much higher than the Vietnamese children in Bangkok. As a result, many second-generation refugee children in Bangkok cannot speak Vietnamese fluently and have comparatively little knowledge of their homeland in Vietnam.

³¹ Wirachai Neawbunnian, 1992, p 26.

³² Personal interview.

³³ Personal interview.

³⁴ Peter Pool, *Can Thailand's Vietnamese Refugees be Assimilated?* p 11-12.

Living with an illegal status and witnessing unequal treatment of their parents by Thai officers greatly impacted them. They saw that their parents could not find a good job, nor read or write Thai correctly and, worst of all, were suspected by the Thai police to be communist-oriented activists. Therefore, those children did not feel proud to express their Vietnamese origin when they grew up. Refugee parents, for their part, tried as much as they could, to teach their children the Vietnamese language and remind them of their homeland. But since those parents had to work very hard to earn their living, the time they could devote to their children was limited.³⁵ Furthermore, outside the family, the children had no chance to speak or exchange with other children because they were afraid of being known as having Viet origin.

Concerning their spiritual life, since there was no official place for them to go and meet each other at that time, the Vietnamese temples seemed to be the only place recognized by the Thai government for a Buddhist layman. Due to their illegal status and their harsh daily life, although the majority claimed themselves Buddhist,³⁶ the Vietnamese, according to my survey, did not go to a Buddhist temple frequently. They preferred to go there only on Vietnam's special days such as Tết (The Vietnamese New Year), National Day, National Revolution Day, Ho Chi Minh's birthday and a few other important Buddhist days to meet each other. Temples that they frequented were only the temples where there were Vietnamese monks staying such as Từ Tế (Wat Lokanukro) and Cảnh Phước (Wat Samanam Boriharn).

Being afraid that a gathering of Vietnamese refugees might endanger the government's security, the Thai government tried to limit or, sometimes, interfere with their activities, especially during the second regime of Phibul Songkhram: in order to get closer to the US Alliance and to protect the country from Communist invasion, Phibul's government applied very strict laws on the

³⁵ Personal interview.

³⁶ Regarding the religion of the Vietnamese refugees, the result of the survey on the Vietnamese people in Bangkok showed 80% of the Vietnamese refugees claimed themselves Buddhist, 10% are Christian while the remaining 10% claim no religious affiliation. Therefore, it would appear that most of the Vietnamese refugees in Bangkok are Buddhist. The Christian Vietnamese, according to the survey, mostly belong to the Old Vietnamese or Yuon Kaw.

Vietnamese refugees. Vietnamese refugees were followed by secret agents if they were involved with other communist-oriented refugees.³⁷ Temples were frequented by police to check whether they concealed weapons or other support for the communist movement.³⁸ The Thai government required secret agents to keep an eye on the movement of the Vietnamese refugees in Bangkok, especially at Vietnamese temples where they usually gathered.³⁹ Consequently, until the end of the Vietnam War, the temple's followers, including both Old and New Vietnamese, for the sake of their safety, avoided getting involved with the temple's activities. Their children, therefore, had very little relation with Vietnamese temples. After Master Bình Lương (Cụ Ba), Bảo Ân and Ông Quyền, no further Vietnamese monks were found in the Annam-nikai order. The temples were replaced by Chinese-Thai or Thai (mostly Northeastern Thai) monks. These monks, due to different backgrounds and cultures, could not speak Vietnamese nor understand Vietnamese people well enough. Thus, the adherence of the Vietnamese community failed.

If the reason for going to Vietnamese temples was gathering together to chat and exchange thoughts with their compatriots or consult Vietnamese monks, now they seldom went there because firstly, there were very few, if any, Vietnamese people going to Wat Yuon; secondly, they could not find a monk who could speak Vietnamese there to consult. Thus, they no longer find the Vietnamese atmosphere there.

Concerning the group of Old Vietnamese, since Thailand joined the US's alliance, especially after the SEATO pact, Thailand, in order to demonstrate its good intentions, worked hard on its anti-communist stance. Consequently, the communist-suspected Vietnamese were followed and arrested at any time.⁴⁰ Vietnamese houses and temples were frequented by the Thai police. The Old Vietnamese, who came to Bangkok since early Rattanakosin, were almost

³⁷ Personal interview with Vietnamese refugees in Bangkok.

³⁸ Personal interview with Chao Kana Yai (Chief Abbot of Annam-nikai) and Senior abbot from Cảnh Phước temple (Wat Samanam Boriharn).

³⁹ Thananan Boonwana, 2002, p 92.

⁴⁰ Personal interview.

completely assimilated and maintained no active connections with the New Vietnamese. Some of the other groups of Old Vietnamese, who came to Bangkok during the first French domination, still kept relations with the New Vietnamese. Others, seeing the repression that the New Vietnamese suffered from Thai policy, decided to keep their distance from the group of new Vietnamese. Some of them, for the sake of their security, tried not to have any involvement with the New Vietnamese. They distinguished themselves from the refugees and did not want to be understood as having a Vietnamese identity.

The success of the Thai anti-communist law and the anti-Vietnamese campaign drastically affected the refugee's life. The negative sentiments towards the Vietnamese still lingered until the mid 1980s when Likhit Dhiravegin conducted a survey in December 1984 to examine the national sentiments within Thai people and leadership.⁴¹ The Vietnamese ranked the most distrusted nationality among ten nationalities of Westerners, Japanese, Indian, Chinese, Malay, Burmese, Vietnamese, Cambodia, Laotian and Thai.

The anti-communist law and other special policies aimed at the Vietnamese refugees in Thailand made the first group come to Vietnamese temples less and less because they did not want to be followed or implicated as being involved with communist Vietnam by the Thai authorities. Especially after the Vietnam War, prejudice from the anti-Vietnam campaign made the second Vietnamese generation living in Bangkok and the newcomers not want to express their Vietnamese heritage.

In the past, the unity and solidarity among the Vietnamese in Thailand was aimed towards the nation's liberation; now, with this purpose achieved, they had no need to be involved in political activities. Adding to that, the number of Vietnamese coming to Bangkok, lawfully or unlawfully, after 1975 increased. They mainly belonged to the second and third Vietnamese generation. Witnessing the ups and downs of their parents during their childhood, the children and grand children of the Vietnamese refugees only

⁴¹ Likhit Dhiravegin, *Nationalism and the State in Thailand*, Research Center of the Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University, 1985.

wanted to peacefully earn their living. Thus, they chose to hide their Vietnamese origin, not daring to go to Vietnamese temples openly. When they felt being Viet (or being called Yuon) in Thai society was not welcomed (It does not mean that they did not feel proud of their Viet origin, but they had to conceal it), the Vietnamese in Thailand chose to hide their origin from Thai people.

In regards to Annam-nikai temples, due to the Thai policy and the treatment received from Thai authorities such as searching temples and questioning people, Thai monks ordained in Annam-nikai did not want to get involved with the Vietnamese community. If they did, it was just only with the first group of Old Viets. Annam-nikai monks, especially the present Chief Abbot of Annam-nikai, practiced a neutral policy towards the Vietnamese as well as the government of communist Vietnam.

The situation of Annam-nikai temples and monks in this period, as recalled by the abbot of Quảng Phước temple (Annamnikairam temple at Bang Po), was pitiful. Monks had to bring amulets with them whenever they went out of the temple. The Thai government sent authorities to almost all Vietnamese temples to search for underground hideouts. Though the monks tried to explain to them their political stand point, the authorities never listened because they held a prejudice towards everything concerning Vietnam. Thus, all the Annam-nikai monks could do was to be patient. Being Phra Yuon (Vietnamese monks as translated in Thai language, even though they were not Vietnamese monks and had no connection with Vietnam) meant enduring hardships. Thus, some monks dared not to call themselves Phra Yuon in public, but Phra Jin (Chinese monk), though they knew that was incorrect.⁴²

The previous study argues that the policy of the Thai government during this time is considered the main factor forcing the Vietnamese refugees in Bangkok to hide their origin and adapt to the larger Thai society. But, at present, with the end of the Vietnam War 30 years ago and the Cold War is no longer an

⁴² Summarized by the author from *Siam Post Newspaper* on 5th September 1993. Cited in Sowatee Nathalang, 1994, p 141.

issue of world politics, the Vietnamese in Thailand still kept hiding their origin, not coming to Vietnamese temples. Thus, it will be unfair to consider the Thai policy as the only reason of adaptation. Because, despite how severe the political situation was, legislation could only affect external behavior. If Thailand and Vietnam did not have similarities in custom, belief and culture, the process of adaptation/integration probably would not have occurred as fast or as deep. Therefore, a comparison of the key values and ideology of Vietnamese and Thai people will be examined hereafter to explain the internal reason for the smooth adaptation of the Vietnamese refugees in Bangkok.

3.1.4. Cultural similarities between Thai and Vietnamese people

Having the same background as a water-rice culture, Thai culture shares many similarities with Vietnamese culture. Both countries were animistic before Buddhism was introduced. People in both countries worshiped god (Trời or) and many other spirits (Thần).

A long time before Buddhism was officially introduced to Vietnam, Vietnamese people had heard about a “Buddha” (Phật) with a great heart of benevolence that would come and help all the beings in this world when they needed it.⁴³ Therefore, when they confronted difficulties, besides god (Trời), Vietnamese people prayed to Buddha (Phật) as well. “*Lạy trời lạy Phật*” or “*Trời Phật*” was their frequent prayer when they were in trouble which means “Thank god and Buddha.”

Also, Thai people had a strong belief in god (พระเจ้า, เจ้า) or ghost (ผี). There are ghosts and gods everywhere: ghost of the house, ghost of the garden, ghost of the tree or god of the place (เจ้าที่). When Buddhism came to Thailand, this belief did not disappear; on the contrary, it has combined and coexisted

⁴³ Trần Ngọc Thêm, *The Basics of Vietnamese Culture*, Education Publisher, Hanoi, 1999, p 242-243.

with Buddhism, especially in rural areas where people still believe and practice the old way of worshipping.⁴⁴

Beside the old belief of animism, cosmological and astrological beliefs have been around for a long time, influencing people's life in both countries. This can be seen in the belief of "fate," "soul" (or spirit), "luck," and "one's leading star" for example.

Vietnamese people use "fate" (Số or Số phận) to explain one's bad or good luck: "*Xấu số*" (bad luck), "*Số đở*" (good luck), "*Tùy số*" (It's up to fate). In the same way, Thai people use "ดวง" (fate) to explain everything (bad or good) that happens unexpectedly to someone.⁴⁵ For example: "ดวงไม่ดี" "ดวงดี" or "แล้วแต่ดวง" which means "bad fate" (bad luck), "good fate" (good luck), and "it's up to your fate," respectively.

In regards to "soul" or "spirit", although Thai people believe in more spirits than Vietnamese people,⁴⁶ people in both countries share the same belief that a spirit is an immaterial part of a human being. Thus, when someone faints, the Vietnamese usually call loudly for the "Hồn" or "Vía" (soul and spirit) to come back to the body; while to the Thai people, when a "ขวัญ" (spirit) has gone away, they also call it back to its human part.

As well as Thai people, Vietnamese people believe in "may" or "may mắn" which means "good luck." In Vietnamese language, there are many expressions concerning this belief such as: "*May hơn khôn*," which means one can win without skill or knowledge because of his or her good luck; "*Trò may rủi*," which means "The game of chance."

Cosmologists and astrologists in both countries wield the belief that human fate has a relation with the time and date of birth and the circulation of

⁴⁴ Seri Pongpith, Ghost, *Key Term in Thai Thoughts*, Suwanna Satha-anand , Nuangnoi Boonyanate (ed), Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 1992, p 66.

⁴⁵ Suwanna Satha-anand , Nuangnoi Boonyanate (ed), 1992, p 50.

⁴⁶ The Vietnamese believe that a human being has 3 souls and 7 spirits (for men) or 9 spirits (for women), while in different Thai belief people have 32, 40, 99, or even 100 spirits corresponding with different parts of the body. (Nuangnoi Boonyanate, 1992, p 77).

the stars, especially the 12 leading stars at the 12 corners of the sky which symbolize the 12 horoscopes of human beings. This can be seen every year during the Star worshipping ceremony of Annam-nikai temples.

Concerning moral and social influences, Thai and Vietnamese people also share a great deal in social beliefs such as morality, the leading role in family, and Buddhist beliefs.

Due to extended Chinese domination, Vietnamese society received the influence of Confucianism and Taoism, especially in regards to the leading role of men. Consequently, in the family, the father was always the leader while the mother was the follower. If the father passed away, the leading role was transferred to the eldest son. The saying “*Tại gia tông phụ, xuất giá tông phu, phu tử tông tử*” would be a good example for the men’s role in Vietnamese society; this saying literally means that at home the woman has to follow her father; after married, she has to follow her husband; and if the husband passes away, she has to follow her son. Likewise, in Thai society, Dr Nuangnoi Boonyanate has cited the definition of “ครอบครัว” as “*A family (big or small) means children and wife together, with the husband as the ruler.*”⁴⁷ This definition clearly demonstrates the leading role of the men in Thai families.

In terms of morals, the word “*ơn*” or “*ơn huệ*” (gratitude) is widely known in both the literature and daily life of Vietnamese people. In their vocabulary, this word is found combined with many verbs – “*Biết ơn*” (to be grateful), “*Chịu ơn*”, “*mang ơn*” (to owe someone a debt of gratitude), “*Trả ơn*” (to show/pay gratitude towards someone) – to remind people to live with love and gratefulness. Similarly, the word “*บุญคุณ*” (gratitude) is also found in early Thai language as a key word underlying Thai moral values.

Finally, in regards to Buddhism, it is impossible to talk about Buddhist ideology without mentioning the belief in karma. If Vietnamese people believe in “Do good receive good, do evil receive evil” or “*Nghiệp*” and “*Nghiệp*”

⁴⁷ Ibid, p 43.

chướng” (karma or karma from previous life) to explain their fate, Thai people hold the same faith. According to the Venerable Doctor Mettanado Bhikkhu, more than 70% of Thai Buddhists are karmic.⁴⁸ Thai people learn that karma, the result of their previous lives, will indicate their happiness, longevity, or fortune in this life.⁴⁹

Besides the similarities in culture and beliefs, it is necessary to mention the characteristics of Vietnamese Buddhism. According to Professor Trần Ngọc Thêm – a well known academician in Vietnam – when Buddhism came to Vietnam, the Viet people received and adapted it to their own belief and ideology. Therefore, in Vietnamese culture, these two belief systems integrated, becoming the basis of Vietnamese culture. Consequently, Vietnamese Buddhism has basically three main characteristics: the combination of many beliefs and religions (in most of Vietnamese temples Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism and other local gods and heroes were worshipped together); the femininity (this characteristic can be seen in the worshipping of Bodhisattva Kwan Yin, Tứ Pháp --the 4 most famous and ancient goddesses of cloud, rain, thunder and lightening); and **flexibility**.

The latter characteristic would be expanded to the concept of “*Phật tại tâm*” or “Buddha is in your heart” – the concept that was highly recognized during the Golden time of Vietnamese Buddhism (from the 10th to the 14th century).

Looking back to the Golden time of Vietnamese Buddhism, specifically when Vietnamese Bamboo Forest Zen was introduced by King Trần Nhân Tông, the concept of “*Phật tại tâm*” or “Buddha is in your heart” was highly recognized. When the court advisor, Venerable monk Đại Đăng, tried to convince King Trần Thái Tông to come back to the throne from his monastic life at Yên Tử mountain, he said: “*Buddha is not in the mountain; Buddha is in the human heart. The peaceful heart which creates consciousness is a true*

⁴⁸ Notes from class lectures of Samatha Meditation in Thailand, Thai Studies program, Chulalongkorn University, November, 2005.

⁴⁹ Elliott Kulick and Dick Wilson, *Time for Thailand: Profile of a New Success*, White Lotus, 1996, p 91.

*Buddhist heart.*⁵⁰ So, the idea of “Buddha is in your heart” was the main concept of Vietnamese Buddhism through the centuries.

Another expansion of the flexibility of Vietnamese Buddhism besides the concept of “Buddha is in your heart” is “self-cultivation at home.” There is no exact document telling when or where it came from, but any Vietnamese person can tell you the proverb “*Thứ nhất là tu tại gia, thứ nhì tu chợ thứ ba tu chùa*” which literally means “the most important thing that a Buddhist should do is self-cultivate at home, secondly is self-cultivate at the market and thirdly is self-cultivate at the temple.” This proverb can be understood simply by Vietnamese people that: if you would like to be a good Buddhist, you should firstly do good things in your family, for members of your family; secondly do good things for people in your community or further contribute to your community; and finally do good things for the temple.

To extend this explanation, doing good things for members of your family also means be dutiful or show gratitude towards parents. Venerable monk Thich Thanh Tu, a respected academic monk in Vietnam, said in his book of “Buddhism and Nation”⁵¹ that “*Paying gratitude to your parents means worshipping gods and Buddha*”⁵² as one Vietnamese proverb says

*“Tu đầu cho bằng tu nhà
Thờ Cha kính Mẹ mới là chân tu ”*

(For one’s good self-cultivation, worship and respect for one’s own father and mother is the true and correct way).

Thus, looking at the background of Vietnamese and Thai culture, it is obvious to see that both countries have many similarities in custom, culture and religious belief. From the basis of water-rice culture and animist belief, people in both countries received Buddhism as their national religion and mixed it with their own beliefs to form the key values of their thoughts and ideology. Having

⁵⁰ Vũ Thanh Huân, *Some Features of Vietnamese Buddhism through Historical Event, Buddhism and the History of Vietnamese Ideology*, Institute of Philosophy, Committee of Social Science of Vietnam, Hanoi 1986, p 169.

⁵¹ Thich Thanh Tu, *Buddhism and Nation*, Vietnamese Buddhist Association, 1992.

⁵² *Ibid*, p 187.

the same belief in religion and astrology, the resistance to the assimilation of Buddhist Vietnamese into Thai culture seems less strained than the process of people from different religions must undergo; for example, the Straits Chinese in Singapore and Java, and Muslims from Indonesia and Malaysia in the West. Those people face not only political discrimination from the local authorities, but due to their different culture, they cannot accept an easy integration like the Vietnamese Buddhist community in Bangkok.

Additionally, in Thai society, the upward mobility differed from colonial societies in the region because the high value in the Thai social system (power, prestige, and wealth in this case), in the past, belonged to the elite Thai.⁵³ (Nowadays, with the modernization and globalization's tendency, it might change to western symbols.) Unlike in other colonial societies, such as Singapore, where the high social values belonged to the British, the movement's tendency was orientated to the higher British colonial system rather than to the lower indigenous society.⁵⁴ But in Thai society, this upward mobility of aliens or immigrants was directed to Thai society. However, due to the huge difference in religion, culture and attitude, a smooth assimilation in colonial society seemed more strenuous; whereas, in Thailand, the Buddhist Vietnamese feels more familiar to Thai Buddhism and Thai cultural values than other religions such as Christianity or Islam.

Moreover, in Vietnamese Buddhism, the concept of "Buddha is in your heart" dominates Buddhist's behavior. Thus, for a Buddhist Vietnamese, to be a good Buddhist it is not necessary to go to a Vietnamese temple. Doing good things for members in your family, contributing to your community, and paying gratitude to your parents are more important than going to the temples. Besides, the *flexibility* in Vietnamese Buddhism could also be a good explanation for the

⁵³ The data on the "Occupational Classification by Nationality, Phranakhon" done by the Central Statistic of Bangkok in 1952 showed the highest status of the occupation class in Thai society were high-ranking government officials, large business owners, highest –status professionals, high-ranking office staff respectively. (William G. Skinner, p 301).

⁵⁴ See more details in *The Ambiguity of Identity: Ethnicity Maintenance and Change among the Straits Chinese Community of Malaysia and Singapore*, John R. Clammer, Institute of South East Asian Studies, University of Singapore, 1979.

absence of the Vietnamese in Annam-nikai temples, because they can flexibly choose to go to either Thai or Vietnamese temples. Especially, in Thailand, where Buddhist temples are found everywhere and the people are well known for their hospitality, the resistance to smooth integration is virtually very frail.

Consequently, nowadays, only 55% of the interviewees heard about Annam-nikai and 15% of them sometimes go to its temple.⁵⁵ The new generation of Vietnamese refugees, doesn't know much about this Vietnamese Buddhist order in Thailand and never think of being ordained or having their son to be ordained in the Annam-nikai order. If they want to make merit, their choice is any temple that is near and convenient to them. The given reason for this is "Buddha is in your heart." Thus, it is not matter of Vietnamese temple or Thai temple, if one wants to make merit; the Buddha is with him/her. Moreover, according to my survey, 80% of the interviewees saw that the Mahayana Buddhism of Annam-nikai and the Theravada Buddhism of Thailand are slightly different,⁵⁶ 20% said that they are not different. None of the interviewees saw a big difference between these two Buddhist sects. That is why it does not make any difference. They can be a good Buddhist without going to a Vietnamese Buddhist temple.

In summary, through the study of the migration of the Vietnamese refugees to Bangkok, it is obvious that the refugee's migratory flow into Bangkok increased continuously since the end of WWII. But due to the Thai government's policy during the Cold War, those refugees, when they arrived in Bangkok, had to hide themselves from Thai authorities, not expressing their Vietnamese origin to Thai people. Therefore, the community is scattered everywhere throughout Bangkok and is very hard to identify. The Old Vietnamese, who came to Bangkok since the early Rattanakosin period, were deeply assimilated into Thai society and had almost no relationship or concept of Vietnam. Their great-grand children married with Thai or Chinese-Thai

⁵⁵ See the 2nd questionnaire result in appendices.

⁵⁶ 90% of the interviewed Vietnamese said the Buddhism of Annam-nikai and Theravada Buddhism of Thailand had no differences because both schools teach people to be good.

families. They all achieved certain positions in Thai society.⁵⁷ The Vietnamese coming to Thailand before WWII, though numerically small, also had legal status and had settled in Thai society. Their children could go to school and some even went abroad to study. But, due to the Thai policy, especially Thai prejudice towards the Vietnamese during the Cold War, this group of Old Vietnamese generally kept distant from the refugees. In regards to the group of Vietnam War refugees, most of people believe that they have been all resettled in a third country so no official research has been done on them so far.⁵⁸ Additionally, until the late 1980s, many Thai policies toward refugees were still in effect. Therefore, new refugees from the Vietnam War, legally, shared the same status with the Indochina refugees.

Moreover, due to many similarities in Thai and Vietnamese culture, the Vietnamese refugees, upon hiding themselves, did not feel strange to Thai society; thus the resistance to adaptation was not strong. Through a long period of hiding and adapting, the Vietnamese refugees in Bangkok did not want to show their Vietnamese origin, nor go to Vietnamese temples. The new generation of refugees, has fewer and fewer relations with their community.

To conclude, the Vietnamese refugees in Bangkok, for political reasons, had to conceal their origin and accept adaptation as a coerced choice; but, having adapted to Thai society, they did not feel too different within Thai culture. Thus, integration came voluntarily.

The integration of the Buddhist Vietnamese community explains their absence from Vietnamese temples. But why in Thailand, a Buddhist country, does the new temple community evolve into Chinese Buddhists instead of Thai Buddhists? To answer this question, cultural and geographical factors will hereafter be examined.

⁵⁷ Some of them were granted the “Khun Ying” title as Khun Ying Ya from Bunnag family or being Thai politician.

⁵⁸ During the survey from 2005-2006, I had, by incident, met a few of the refugees from the Vietnam War. Like some of the first and second generation of the refugees from Indochina, they tried to gain legal status from the Thai government by buying it from the authorities or having their children adopted into Thai or Chinese-Thai families. Those Vietnamese live quietly and virtually have no connection with the Indochina refugees. They are, according to my estimate, very small in number.

3.1.5. Cultural similarities between Vietnamese and Chinese people

Historically, Vietnam used to be a vassal state of China for over one thousand years (from 179B.C to 938 A.D). During its domination over Vietnam, the Han dynasty tried to assimilate the Viet with the Han people from China linguistically, ideologically and culturally. The glorious victory in Bạch Đằng in 938 ended the one thousand years of Chinese rule in Vietnam, bringing independence to the country. But Chinese influence was deeply rooted in the whole country. People in both countries shared the same writing system. After recovering independence, Vietnam developed its own writing system based on the Chinese system. But the official language, Court records and Buddhist Sutras were still in Chinese characters. Intellectual Vietnamese and monks could read and write Chinese. Mandarin Chinese was intelligible within the nobility and educated Vietnamese.

In regards to religion, due to the long period of domination, though initially introduced to Vietnam by Indian monks and merchants, Vietnamese Buddhism has the same Mahayana origin as China. Chinese Buddhism greatly influenced the Court of Vietnam until the 20th century. Consequently, Annam-nikai has the Tào Động and Lâm Tế Zen origins from China. Besides the shared origin with Chinese Zen Buddhism, many Vietnamese Buddhist rites and ceremonies also originated from China such as Công Đức (Kong Tek ceremony), Vu Lan (the merit offering to wandering souls festival which often takes place in Mid-July of the Lunar calendar). Moreover, due to the shared origin of Chinese Mahayana Buddhism, the practices of Annam-nikai monks were also familiar to Chinese monks. Therefore, when Annam-nikai was introduced to Siam, its ceremonies and practices were familiar to the Chinese people in Siam. Though they speak different languages, the Chinese in Siam could read Sutras from Annam-nikai temples. Educated monks of Annam-nikai could communicate with Chinese people in mandarin Chinese.

Additionally, up to the reign of King Rama V, no Chinese Buddhist temple could be found in Siam. With the Chinese lacking their own temples

and the familiarity of Annam-nikai practices, it was not difficult for them to accept this Buddhist order.⁵⁹ That was why since early in its history, Annam-nikai received acceptance from the Chinese community. In the beginning, when Annam-nikai temples were still unknown to Thai society, its temples received attendance from the Chinese immigrants. Initially, the Chinese attendance at Annam-nikai temples was limited to small groups of Chinese immigrants who had close relations with the Vietnamese community. Later, when this Buddhist sect was better known in Thai society, the Chinese in Thailand began to pay interest in Annam-nikai. Especially, since the 5th reign, the Chinese supporter group developed significantly, leading to the establishment of four new temples in Yaowarat area (the Chinatown in Bangkok) and eight temples in the provinces presently.⁶⁰

In summary, the foregoing study about the change in the temple's community denotes that the change in temple's community is a continuity of changes. From the beginning, the Vietnamese community shared temple ceremonies with the Chinese Buddhists. The Chinese attendance and attention gradually developed, especially during the reign of King Rama V. It was until post WWII that the community experienced major changes in its Vietnamese support group leading to the integration of the Vietnamese in Bangkok and the replacement of the Vietnamese community with the Chinese community. The reasons for the integration of this Vietnamese group are both political and cultural. The Thai policy during the Indochina War and the Vietnam War was the coercive factor forcing the Vietnamese to go into hiding. The cultural similarities were the internal factors explaining a smooth integration of the Vietnamese.

⁵⁹ The fact is that the Chinese people in Thailand support not only Annam-nikai temples but also Chinese and Thai temples. (See more details in *The History of the Chinese Order*, Mangkorn Kommalawat, Bangkok, 1969)

⁶⁰ Most of the temples of the last period were established by Chinese donations. The last temple (Phước Thành or Wat Thammapanyaram) used to be a Chinese vegetarian house (โถงโรง) before it was donated to the Chief Abbot to be the newest temple of Annam-nikai in 2006).

3.2. Support of Thai Royalty

Besides the large base of Chinese support, Annam-nikai also receives constant support from the Thai community. This support can be seen in the temple's attendance by Thai Buddhists and the special support from Thai royalty. The Kings of Thailand, in any period, play the important role of spiritual supporter of Thai society. Annam-nikai, as part of Thai religion, owes a debt of support to the King as well as the royalty. Since the reign of King Rama IV to the present, Thai royalty gives constant support to Annam-nikai. This Royal support significantly affected its process of adaptation.

The study of the development of Annam-nikai has shown that the establishment of Vietnamese temples was through the community of the Vietnamese immigrants. After having settled in Bangkok, the Vietnamese immigrant community required a religious organization to serve their spiritual life. Then, the Vietnamese temples were founded. But community and temples could not be established if there was no support from the Court especially from the King of Thailand. As proven in its history, the formation of the Vietnamese community came into exist because King Rama I and Rama III granted land to them. On this granted land, the Vietnamese temples were established.

Prior to the reign of King Rama III, there is no record on the material support of Thai royalty to Annam-nikai. The establishment of the Vietnamese temples before King Rama III was through indirect support, namely by granting land for the Vietnamese not only to live, but also to worship.

By the reign of King Rama IV, material support was seen more concretely. The King bought the land surrounding the Khánh Vân Temple (Wat Upai Ratchabumrung), had the temple rebuilt, granted his own Buddha statue to the temple. During the reign of King Rama V, the temple once again received valuable support, such as the renovation of the temple and the building of new stupas. Moreover, King Rama V had all Vietnamese temples registered as Thai Sangha, marking an important change in its history.

After the reign of King Rama V, the Thai Royal Court continues to support Annam-nikai temples, though not as remarkable as during the 4th and the 5th reigns. The support was not always directly from, but through, the royalty and the nobility.

The support from the royal court to Annam-nikai temples, though not much in terms of material, is priceless. Through the interest of Prince Mongkut towards the Vietnamese temples and monastic practices elevated the sects' status. When the prince became king, he gave material support. Moreover, the special interest of King Mongkut made this Buddhist sect were better known not only in Thai society, but also in the Chinese community.

The official recognition of Annam-nikai as part of Thai Buddhism is considered an important step forward in its development. This recognition led to the adaptation of the Order's structure and practice.

First, the registration of Annam-nikai granted equal legal status to the temples. Its temples were no longer considered foreign temples. As a consequence, this led to the major change in its structure: the appearance of the ecclesiastic hierarchy. Prior to this time, Vietnamese monks functioned in temples according to their seniority and their knowledge. Seniority was evaluated via generation.⁶¹ Since this registration, ecclesiastic order was registered under the Ministry of Culture. Thus, records of the temples and monks have been taken.

Also, with its legal status in Thai Buddhism, Annam-nikai could and did independently develop its own policy. Through this legal right, Annam-nikai set up its own administrative system assigning temple abbots, opened new temples, and ran schools. The expansion and development of Annam-nikai came about due to its legal recognition.

⁶¹ That is why in the Master's altar table, before Master Thích Chân Hưng and Master Diệu Trâm - who were known as the first master of Annam-nikai in Thailand – there were two other senior generations named Nguyễn Bảo and Quảng Diên for the Lâm Tế sect and one senior generation named Tấnห์ Huyền for the Tào Động sect. Moreover, since this registration, ecclesiastic order was registered to the Ministry of Culture. Thus, records of the temples and monks have been taken.

Secondly, the official recognition of Annam-nikai led to wider acceptance in Thai society, enlarging its support community to the Thai people. When the King of Thailand, as the supreme leader in Thai society, paid attention and support to the temples, the Thai Buddhist community could not be unconcerned. Therefore, the King's attention to Annam-nikai temples drew more Thai people to the temples. Among them, many were high ranking government officers, and authorities. As a result, these connections paid off during the repressive anti-communist period. At that time temples received assistance from those high ranking supporters.⁶²

Thirdly, with the registration and continuous support from the Thai Court, Annam-nikai temples could persevere through difficult times. During the Vietnam War, when the Vietnamese people reduced and finally terminated their presence, Annam-nikai could still exist, because their status in Thai society was credible enough for other communities to support it.

3.3. Conclusion

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, community is considered the environment in the process of adaptation of religion. Thus, the change of the temple's community is the main reason leading to the adaptation of Annam-nikai. This change is studied via two groups of the temple's community: the Chinese and Thai royalty.

Initially, the temple's community was the Vietnamese; gradually, this community began to encompass some Chinese people, until finally the Vietnamese community was replaced by the Chinese. The reasons for this replacement are first, the cultural and social similarities between the Chinese and the Vietnamese which made the Chinese in Thailand familiar with the practice of Annam-nikai. This familiarity led to the acceptance of the Chinese

⁶² During the Vietnam War, many Vietnamese temples were searched. People who attended temples were followed. But since the temple's followers had close connection with or were high ranking officers and police, Thai authorities could not do much harm to the temples. (Interview with the Abbot of Wat Samanam Boriharn).

within this Buddhist sect; second the assimilation/integration of the Vietnamese Buddhist community in Bangkok.

Annam-nikai was brought into Thailand by a group of Vietnamese immigrants. Through a long settlement in Bangkok, this group of Old Vietnamese gradually adapted and finally assimilated to Thai society. The group of New Vietnamese, though, has not been settled in Bangkok long enough to be assimilated as the first group. But due to political factors, they had to integrate into Thai society as well. The critical time frame of this assimilation and integration is argued to be from post WWII to the end of the Vietnam War. The fluctuation of Thai politics resulted in fluctuation of the Thai government's polity. This fluctuating polity only got more restrictive and harsh for Vietnamese living in Bangkok. The Old Vietnamese assimilated and the New Vietnamese integrated. This also led to the Vietnamese temples emptying of Vietnamese, but filling with Chinese. In addition, the cultural factor is also an important factor leading to the assimilation and integration of the Vietnamese in Bangkok. Sharing many similarities between Thai and Vietnamese culture and worldviews, the resistance to assimilation and integration was less strained. Besides, the flexibility characteristic of Vietnamese Buddhism is the answer for the absence of the Vietnamese from Vietnamese temples nowadays.

Concerning the second group of temple supporters, the constant support from the Thai Royal Court, materially and spiritually, plays a vital role in the process of adaptation of Annam-nikai. Through the recognition and special attention of the Thai Kings, Annam-nikai was legally accepted into Thai Buddhism. This acceptance grabbed the attention of other social groups in Thailand. Moreover, this Royal support also led to the basic change in the structure of Annam-nikai.