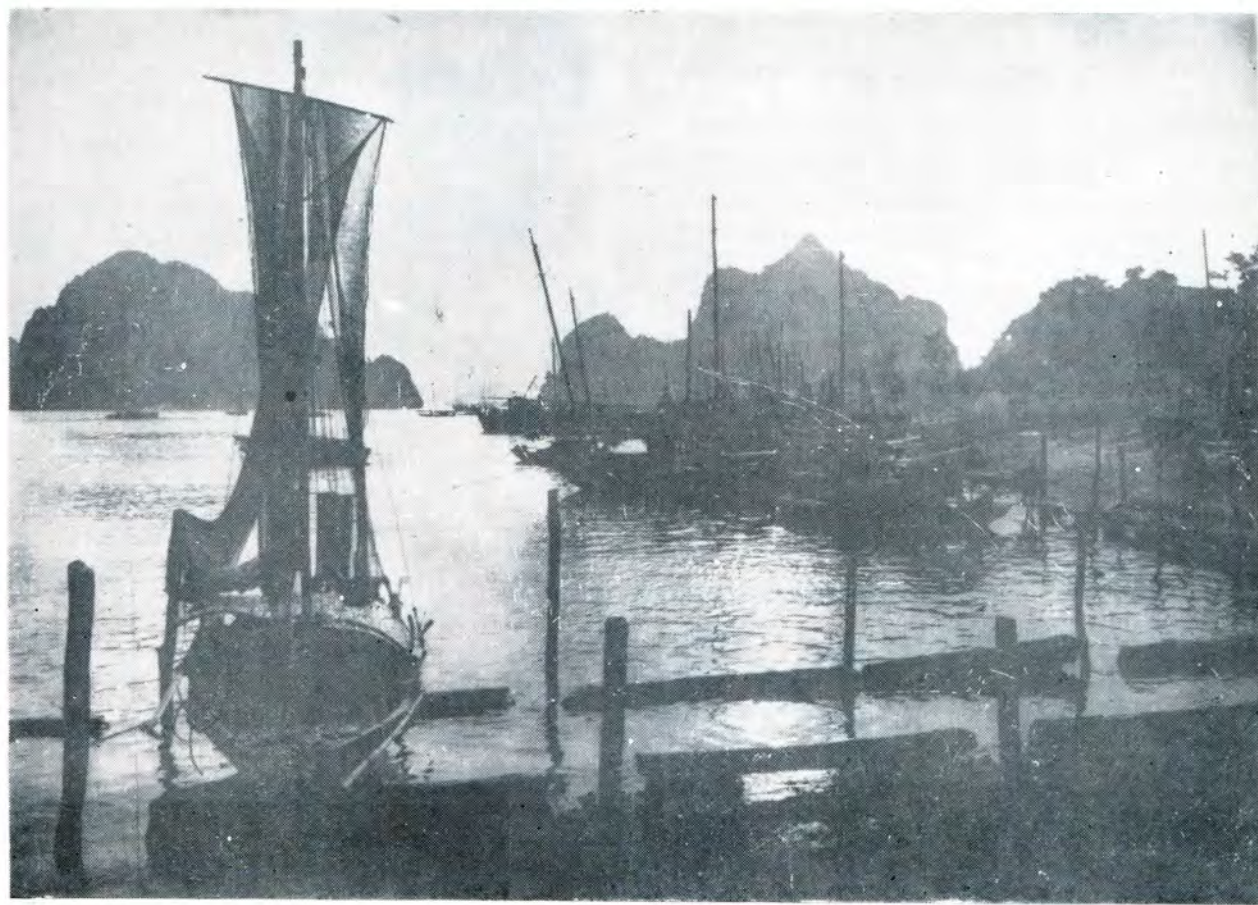


# Vietnam courier



A MONTHLY REVIEW

Volume XIX No. 7



- EDITORIAL OFFICE: 46 Tran Hung Dao, Hanoi, SRV
- DISTRIBUTED BY: Xunhasaba, 32 Hai Ba Trung, Hanoi, SRV



1. Gymnastics class in Hung Dao club.



## CHILDREN'S SPORTS IN HO CHI MINH CITY



2. This Children's Cultural House has 900 visitors every day.

3. The ballet troupe of the Labour Club.

Photos: LE CUONG  
and QUANG MINH (VNA)

# VIETNAMESE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS' Visit to THE PHILIPPINES and THAILAND

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Front Cover: Drying nets in Ha Long Bay.

Photo: VAN PHUC

Minister of Foreign Affairs Nguyen Co Thach recently made an official visit to the Philippines from 6 to 8 June 1983 at the invitation of Filipino Foreign Minister Carlos Romulo. On his way back the Vietnamese Minister stopped over in Thailand where he had talks with Thai Foreign Minister Siddhi Savetsila. Here is the full text of an interview with Vietnam News Agency concerning these visits.

**QUESTION:** How would you appraise the outcome of the talks in the Philippines and Thailand?

**ANSWER:** The outcome is that we have strengthened mutual understanding, agreed to continue dialogue and created an atmosphere of mutual trust. We also deemed it necessary to ease tension and agreed to give due consideration to each others' proposals.

These are only initial results. However, in the context of confrontation over the past years between the ASEAN and Indochinese countries, they are considerable. They have met the general trend at present which favours dialogue in Southeast Asia instead of confrontation which is not in the interest of the countries in the region. The Philippine Foreign Minister has come to the very judicious conclusion that the outcome of the talks will pave the way for constructive dialogues.

**Vietnam  
COURIER**

7 - 1983

**QUESTION: Is it true that the Foreign Ministry of Thailand has announced that the only issue brought to the recent talks was the Kampuchean problem?**

**ANSWER:** In both Manila and Bangkok, we discussed all questions of common concern: the question of peace and stability in Southeast Asia, the question of peaceful co-existence between ASEAN and Indochina, the Kampuchea issue, and question concerning bilateral relations. In both capitals, the Vietnamese side made it clear that the so-called "Kampuchea issue" is mainly a question concerning the Indochinese countries and China, and not between the Indochinese and ASEAN countries, although there also remain differences between the Indochinese and ASEAN countries on this question.

**QUESTION: Did the talks include discussion of Thailand's demand that Vietnam pull back its troops 30 kilometres from the Thai—Kampuchean border?**

**ANSWER:** The Vietnamese side has made it clear that if this was a condition, then Vietnam's answer would be no, but if this was a proposal for the talks, then Vietnam's answer would be to give it due consideration. The Thai side made known that this was not a condition. The Vietnamese side also clearly stated that all proposals must aim at ensuring peace and security for both sides and that Vietnam would not accept any proposals that would only benefit one side to the detriment of the other.

**QUESTION: Did the Vietnamese side make any new proposals?**

**ANSWER:** The Vietnamese side made it clear in Bangkok that the three Indochinese countries have been closely following Thailand's strategy toward them. Does Thailand desire peaceful co-existence with the three Indochinese countries? Or does it pursue the line it has followed over the past 40 years, namely to join outside powers in opposing the three Indochinese countries? The three Indochinese countries are striving for peaceful co-existence with Thailand, while getting ready to cope with the worst eventuality. The Thai side affirmed that Thailand is an independent country and that it wishes to live in peace with the Indochinese countries.

The Vietnamese side also presented a clear picture of the different eventualities:

a) Confrontation between Thailand and the three Indochinese countries will continue for a long time.

b) This state of confrontation will escalate to a degree beyond the control of both sides and bring about incalculably grave consequences.

c) Thailand and the three Indochinese countries pledge themselves, in steadfast forms, not to commit aggression against each other, not to interfere in each other's internal affairs, to respect each other's independence and sovereignty, to settle all disputes through negotiations, to live in peace and co-operate with each other. At the same time, the two sides agree on drastic measures aimed at ensuring peace and security equally for both sides in the Thai—Kampuchean border areas.

d) Pending the settlement of disputes, the two sides should agree on measures to enhance mutual understanding and mutual trust, reduce suspicion and ease tension between the two sides so as to prevent the escalation of the present situation and to bring it under control.

Peace is necessary to Vietnam and the other two Indochinese countries, which have experienced more than 30 years of devastating wars. Treasuring their own independence, they respect the independence of other countries, first of all their neighbours. For these reasons, the Vietnamese side holds that the best possibility is (c) or, if not, (d), and that both sides should try to avoid possibilities (b) and (a).

**QUESTION: Could you please elaborate on Vietnam's concrete proposals?**

**ANSWER:** Both sides made concrete proposals. They promised to give them due consideration and agreed not to make public the content of these proposals.

**QUESTION: Did Vietnam discuss with the Philippines the question of US military bases in that country?**

**ANSWER:** The Philippine side reiterated the Joint Statement of September 1970 between President Ferdinand Marcos and Premier Pham Van Dong in which the two countries pledged themselves not to let foreign countries use their respective territory for direct or indirect aggression against the other country.

**QUESTION: What is your general impression about the result of your recent visits to the two countries?**

**ANSWER:** I am very pleased.

# CRIMINAL COMPROMISE

The so-called Israeli-Lebanese peace accord arranged by the United States has finally been signed.

US President Ronald Reagan called it "a significant step". But the people in the Middle East and progressive opinion across the world have strongly condemned the compromise which the US and Israel have imposed on Lebanon. The so-called agreement is nothing more than a reward to the Israeli aggressors and a gross violation of the sovereignty of Lebanon, victim of aggression. Once this compromise is officially signed, the situation in Lebanon and the Middle East as a whole, far from improving, will deteriorate seriously. The agreement is actually the legalization of the US assistance to Israel in prolonging its occupation of part of the Lebanese territory and permanently partitioning the country. Reagan's "peace plan" and the so-called Israeli-Lebanese accord are only the continuation of the Camp David Accord aimed at opposing the national independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon, sabotaging peace in the Middle East, threatening the security of the neighbouring Arab countries and jeopardizing world peace.

In exchange for a few empty promises, the United States and Israel forced Lebanon to accept such provisions as: establishment of "safety zones" on Lebanese territory; creation of "observation posts" for Israeli troops and a 25-km wide corridor from the northern border of Israel in which troops of Major Haddad, the Lebanese reactionary henchmen of Israel, are allowed to operate; decision on the composition of the Lebanese armed forces, on the kinds and types of weapons the Lebanese army is allowed; restriction on the flights of the Lebanese air force on a wide area of its own country, and establishment of a tripartite commission composed of the United States, Israel and Lebanon to "assume responsibility" for the implementation of the accord. As for Israel, it is not bound by any similar measures even though Lebanon is the only country to be concerned over new

aggressive acts of Israel across their common border. This is a brazen flouting of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon. More serious still, this accord aims to create conditions for the United States and Israel to turn Lebanon into a jumping-off place to commit aggression and threaten the Palestinian people and the security of the neighbouring Arab nations, first of all Syria.

It is obvious that the Reagan administration's policy ever since it gave its blessing to the Israeli aggression against Lebanon in 1982 has been a string of crimes against the Lebanese people. The so-called "mediating role" of the United States led to the horrendous massacres of the Palestinian and Lebanese people, and has undeniably encouraged Israel to impudently carry out its aggressive plans in defiance of all international law.

The Vietnamese people, now as before, resolutely support the just struggle of the Palestinians and the patriotic forces of Lebanon in their resistance to the Israeli aggressors.

We fully support the correct stand of the Soviet Union, the PLO and Syria in categorically rejecting the compromise imposed by the United States and Israel on Lebanon. An equitable and genuinely peaceful solution to the Middle East can be achieved only on the basis of Israel's complete withdrawal from the Arab territories it has occupied, and its recognition of the Palestinian's right to set up an independent State of their own, and its guarantee for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the people of Lebanon and all other Arab nations.

NHAN DAN  
16 May 1983

## PRAQUE '83: Symbol of Peace

*Since the end of 1982, Prague '83, that is, the World Congress for Peace and Life and against Nuclear War, has become the symbol of peace with the picture of a peace dove covering the earth with its outstretched wings. In these days of June the whole of mankind is turning to Prague. Throughout Czechoslovakia, in the thick of the struggle to prevent the US from pushing Europe to a nuclear catastrophe, one feels the price and strength of peace as an organized mass movement. It is no accident that Prague, which was the scene of the first World Peace Congress in 1949, has become the meeting place of various peace forces from all over the world 38*

*years after World War II, when Europe and the whole mankind are on the brink of an extremely dangerous war. Prague, called "the heart of Europe" by many people, is very sensitive to the destiny of this continent. Prague was the victim of invasion during both world wars. Over 360,000 Czechs and Slovaks fell in World War II, and the fate of the tiny village of Lidice on the night of 9-10 June 1942 shook the conscience of the whole world. All the 173 male population were shot dead, 203 women were herded into concentration camps, 81 of the village's 104 children died in the gas chambers. Lidice and hundreds of other towns and villages which were*

## HO CHI MINH CITY:

# INDUSTRY IN THE SERVICE OF AGRICULTURE

The transformation of the suburbs into a vast "green belt" of market gardening, industrial crops and stockbreeding to supply 4 million city folks, as well as the rural population with foodstuffs, not to mention exportation<sup>1</sup>, raises many technical, economic and social problems. The more so as the average area of arable land per capita is but 1,250 square metres (151,000 hectares of agricultural and forest land, or 75% of the total area for 1.2 million people). It is still smaller in the co-operatives and collectives of agricultural production which only mustered 29% of arable land and 38.6% of peasant households by April 15, 1983.

The practice of intensive farming and the working out of high-yield crop areas and big stockbreeding centres call for the renovation of cultivation techniques: hydraulic harnessing, multiplication of crops and reclamation of new land, crop rotation, use of organic fertiliser, adoption of new varieties of rice with a short-growth cycle and high yield, of seeds with high yield, and the introduction of new scientific achievements, mainly in the struggle against epiphytics and epizootics, in the choice and selection of seeds and new animal strains.

The completion of this scientific and technical revolution, together with the revolution in relation of

production — that is agricultural cooperativisation — requires the service of industry. Since liberation in 1975 much has been done to bring tremendous changes to the suburbs of Ho Chi Minh City. Now it is crisscrossed with irrigation canals and power transmission lines. Electricity which only catered for the centre of the city now serves agricultural production, particularly irrigation and the processing of agricultural products. Following the example of the North wells are no longer dug with machines powered with imported gasoline nor gasoline-operated pumps as in the neo-colonialist period.

Below are the problems which crop up and the tasks to be carried out in the next three years as regards hydraulization, electrification and agricultural mechanization.

### *Hydraulization*

We have built:

- 9 electric pumping stations (6 already commissioned) to irrigate 9,800 hectares;
- 3 systems to check salt water (at Thu Duc, Nha Be, and Binh Khanh) catering for 24,000 hectares;
- 5 electric drainage stations at Pham Van Hai State farm;
- 5 drainage canals to wash acid land serving 54,000 hectares;
- 643 wells to irrigate 1,277 hectares.

All these works have entailed 70 million dong (at 1976 constant prices) of investment, not to men-

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*razed to the ground, Oradour in France, Guernica in Spain, Khatyn in Byelorussia and recently Son My in the Vietnam war, are stinging pains in the heart of mankind.*

*And now that mankind is facing a threat to the survival of civilization, the reckless attempts of ultra-belligerent circles in the US who have many times wanted to use nuclear weapons to "exter-*

*minate communism", and the dangerous potential of the stock of nuclear weapons in the world, everyone is conscious of their responsibility: staying the hands of those crazy adventurists who are gambling with the destiny of mankind.*

NHAN DAN,  
19 June 1983

# SOUTH VIETNAM, EIGHT YEARS AFTER LIBERATION

tion an important amount of foreign currency to import pumps and spare parts. However, their rentability is poor owing, on the one hand, to the slow growth of the cooperative movement which alone could enable their rational and efficacious organization and exploitation, and on the other, to the fact that their lay-out is not up to the mark.

For 1983-1985 the question is not to erect new works but to complete existing ones and those under construction while improving their management and exploitation. As regards small hydraulics, particular attention must be paid to the building of networks of wells to irrigate vegetables and annual industrial crops, to the completion of the networks of canals, ditches and drains, pumping and drainage stations, to the commissioning of canals to check salt water, irrigate and drain fields.

## *Electrification*

In this domain, the amount of electricity allotted to agricultural production quadrupled in 1981 as against 1978.

130 kilometres of medium voltage lines and 112 transformers with a total capacity of 9,607 kVA catering for 5 State farms, 6 pumping stations, 56 collectives of agricultural production and cooperatives for market gardening and annual industrial crops have been set up. Mention should also be made of 9 million kWh supplied to small industry and handicraft establishments to process agricul-

tural products and 4 million kWh used by peasant households.

For 1983-1985, 90 million *dong* (at 1976 constant prices) will be invested to set up 78 kilometres of lines of single phase medium voltage, 152 kilometres of triple phase medium voltage, 140 kilometres of low voltage, 308 transformers with a total capacity of 13,000 kVA. The energy capacity for agriculture will be up by 3,400 kVA in 1983 and 5,600 kVA in 1985, and the amount of electricity allotted to this sector will reach 25 million kWh and 31 million kWh respectively.

## *Mechanization*

This concerns both field work and the processing of agricultural products, using mainly small and medium machines, that is tractors and mini-ploughs, not to mention renovated working implements and traditional tools.

Ploughing is mechanized thanks to 1,270 tractors and other machines of various kinds (among which 190 tractors of over 30 HP) with a total capacity of 5,000 HP. Pumping stations for irrigation and drainage have at their disposal 11,000 pumps of various kinds with a capacity of 165,075 cu.m./hour.

With the recent establishment of a combinat for the building of agricultural machines (4 workshops) and a joint enterprise of agricultural machines (State—private capital), great efforts have been made over the past years to supply agriculture with rudimentary tools, renovated hand-carts, shelling ma-

chines, husking mills, insecticide sprayers, mechanical pumps, fodder-processing machines, press mills for coprah (16 tonnes/day) and sugar-cane (50 tonnes/day), etc.

All districts are provided with repair and construction workshops and the villages with forges. With the help of a company of agricultural technical equipment (belonging to the city industrial service) three mechanics outfits have been set up at An Nhon Tay, Trung My Tay and Tan Tuc, mainly to process agricultural products, as well as workshops for medium repair and complete manufacture (both to draw up projects and use machines and equipment, train technicians and qualified workers) in the districts of Cu Chi, Hoc Mon and Duyen Hai...

However, the use of machines remains scattered and poorly rentable owing to the lack of qualified workers, poor preparation of fields, the bad management of machine and tractor stations. The district workshops have not set themselves an orientation and production plan. The supply of renovated working implements and tools (2.5 instead of 5 per capita) and the production of tractor spare parts are far short of the mark.

For 1983—1985 the mechanization of ploughing will require that big tractors of over 30 HP be allotted to State farms and major areas devoted to specialized crops, small tractors and mechanical pumps of districts to production collectives and agricultural co-

# SOUTH VIETNAM EIGHT YEARS AFTER LIBERATION

operatives, while private machines must be rationally used. District workshops and village forges will only make semi-mechanical working implements, renovated ones and tools, whereas the manufacture of mechanical instruments will stay with the urban factories (sets of machines for the gradual comprehensive mechanization of agricultural works: ploughing, transplanting, weeding, pumping, insecticide spraying, harvesting, husking...; machines to process agricultural products; equipment to transport and preserve grains, serve stockbreeding, make building materials). Thus, by 1985 40% of the arable land will be mechanically ploughed compared with 20% in 1982.

The completion of all projects of hydraulization, electrification and mechanization of agriculture will need huge investments valued at 1.3 billion *dong* for 1983-1985 (at 1976 constant prices) supplied both by the State budget and the contributions of the population, the collectives and the district administration, the latter having to intensify their export of agricultural products to cover their import of equipment, machines and materials.

## LE DAN

1. *Following a recent agreement signed with the USSR, Ho Chi Minh City supplies to Siberia vegetables and tinned duck meat in exchange for machines and equipment (See Saigon Giai Phong daily of February 17, 1983).*

During the last years before their fall, the US imperialists and their Saigon puppet administration dropped large quantities of bombs and toxic chemicals on the suburbs of Ho Chi Minh City. That is why the City's immense suburban area became barren, and there remained only stumps of burnt trees.

After liberation, the city started to transform itself and build a new life for its population. In this endeavour the supply of timber for the city became very necessary for the building of new houses and other public projects, for making means of transport as well as furniture and firewood. The demand for wood and timber is very great. If one person is provided with 0.05 cubic metres of timber, then the city needs 175,000 cu.m. a year, whereas the State can only supply the city with between 40,000 and 50,000 cu.m. annually. This, not to mention the 1.2 million peasants in the suburbs who face great difficulties in housing. Besides, the improvement of aluminous and saline soils, the tapping of source of fresh water, the protection of fields by the building of breakwaters and windbreaks, and the needs of communications and defence call for greater efforts in afforestation. Trees also help alleviate industrial pollution and give freshness to the city's landscape.

To heal the wounds of wars and solve step by step the above requirements, on the one hand the city relies on the State's supply and cooperates with other provinces which are abundant in forest resources, and on the other hand launched movements for afforestation and encouraged people to plant trees everywhere. This is considered one of the important tasks that must be given priority investments in manpower and money.

Since 1976, a mass movement for tree-planting on Tet occasions and throughout the year has been organized by the city. The number of trees planted has rapidly

increased, 100,000 in 1976, 2.5 million in 1978 and some 5 million in 1981. And now, after seven years, the whole city has planted 35 million trees and is striving to plant 10 million trees per year. The districts in the suburbs have also promoted tree-planting. For example, Cu Chi has already planted over 23 million trees; Hoc Mon, nearly 3 million; and Binh Chanh, 1.5 million...

These were mainly planted in private gardens, whereas collectively-planted trees are fewer in number. The result is heartening:

## TREE PLANTING in HO CHIMINH City

80% of the trees planted in family gardens are alive, although the ratio in the collective sector is lower. They are local trees which the inhabitants had experience in tending, including both timber and fruit trees. The protection of trees planted in public places or along roadsides is not given proper attention. Trees grow well in Cu Chi and Duyen Hai districts, while in other places people have to plant them time and again. The trees planted in the early years are now beginning to give fruit, timber and firewood. Many families have earned tens of thousands of *dong* from their gardens. The small yellow bamboo of Cu Chi is used to make a large variety of



export items which bring a considerable income to every family in the district.

The re-afforestation of the city's 36,000 ha of forest and forest land, which were formerly destroyed by American bombs and toxic chemicals, has been given due attention and appropriate investments. From 1978 up to now, 21,000 ha of forest trees have been planted, an average of over 4,000 ha per year. Here, the motto "The State and population—the central and regional authorities—pooling their efforts" is brought into full play. The State has invested nearly 10 million *dong*, 2 million given by the Ministry of Forestry and nearly 8 million from the city's fund. Besides, from 1978 to 1982, nearly 6 million *dong* were allotted to the mass movement of planting trees everywhere in the city.

There are particular ways of mobilizing other forces in planting trees. The number of workers of the forestry branch is not large, and most of them are specialized in forestry planning, planting techniques, checking criteria of the products, plant protection, etc., that is why the afforestation has been done mainly by local people (co-op members, members of fishing collectives in Duyen Hai who signed contracts with the State forestry farms in this area, or contracted workers). Thanks to this, the mechanism of the forestry farms is not cumbersome, unnecessary investments can be avoided, and a large workforce can be mobilized, especially during the scheduled planting time.

The city's targets for 1985 are: 45 — 50 million of trees — the equivalent of 10,000 — 15,000 ha of forest; on aluminous and saline soil the city will plant food crops, industrial trees and trees for timber and firewood on an experimental basis on about 15,000 ha; and completion of 21,000 ha of forest in Duyen Hai district.

NGUYEN OANH

## **Intensive Cultivation and Crop Multiplication in QUANG NAM — DA NANG**

### **Treble Cropping**

Quang Nam — Da Nang province in Central Vietnam has about 130,000 hectares of cultivated land or nearly 10% of the land surface. Of this, rice occupies only 60,000 hectares or 40% of the tilled area. It is a tradition in the province to grow only two rice crops a year — the spring crop harvested in the 3rd lunar month and the autumn crop harvested in the 8th lunar month. But due to its small crop land in relation to the population, even with two rice crops per year the province suffers chronic food shortage especially in the pre-harvest days. When things got too rough, the local farmers left their villages in quest of casual jobs elsewhere. In 1975 and 1976, the first years after the liberation of South Vietnam, successive consignments of food relief had to be sent to the province.

Like other provinces, on the agricultural front, Quang Nam — Da Nang is focussing on food production with the aim of achieving self-sufficiency for the whole province. Besides subsidiary food crops like sweet potato, manioc and maize, the province has since 1976 conducted a wide campaign for the growing of three rice crops in a year on the same fields according to the following formula:

— Winter-spring rice + spring-summer rice + 3rd rice crop.

— Winter-spring rice + sweet potato or spring groundnut + autumn rice.

— Winter-spring rice + spring-summer rice + winter food crop.

Of the three rice crops, the one planted in spring-summer benefits from the most favourable climate when there is plenty of sun and the temperature is most propitious for the growth and tilling of the rice plants. The only drawback for this crop is the dryness which usually occurs in the period from April to July when the water level in the rivers is at its lowest. If this can be overcome through an adequate irrigation system, the spring-summer rice could fully benefit from the light and temperature in this season to give high productivity.

Since the adoption in 1976 of the treble-cropping regime the area under spring-summer rice has expanded from 5,129 hectares to 18,264 hectares while per hectare yield slightly decreased from 3,990 kilos to 3,974 kilos.

In 1982, Quang Nam — Da Nang reaped 7.5 tonnes of rice per hectare on its double- or treble-

# SOUTH VIETNAM EIGHT YEARS AFTER LIBERATION

cropped fields. Dien Ban district chalked up more than 10 tonnes per hectare during four consecutive years. More than 30 cooperatives obtained upward of 15 tonnes on treble-cropped fields. In particular, Dai Phuoc co-op hit the 22-tonne mark, the highest in the country. Total paddy output of the province in 1982 amounted to 520,000 tonnes, raising food share per head of population to 342 kilos from 303 kilos in 1979. Food procurement to the State amounted to 71,000 tonnes or 195% higher than in 1979. For many years now the province has become self-sufficient in food and has even sold some surplus to the State.

## Time-table of the Treble-Cropping Regime

The temperature in the province throughout the year is favourable for the growth of all heat-absorbing rice strains. The only slack time where the growth of the rice plant is virtually stopped occurs in only a few days of January or February when temperature drops to 14—15 degrees C, and the only adverse factor preventing the cultivation of any rice is the flood which usually occurs from mid-October to mid-November. This is why, the winter-spring rice can be planted only after November and the third rice crop must be harvested before the middle of October.

In other words, the cultivation season virtually stretches through 330 days in a year. But to make the plants grow favourably, the winter-spring rice must be made to come into ear after the spring rain season and must be harvested before the middle of April. The spring-summer rice must be planted

from the middle to the end of April and harvested before mid-July. The third rice crop must be planted before July 30 and harvested before the middle of October in order to avoid the flood reason.

To ensure success for all the three crops, there must be strict observance of a planting program. That is why, apart from good management of labour, and good preparation of the draught force, the choice of short-term rice strains is also very important. For instance, to make the spring-summer or third rice crop grow and yield at the proper time, it is essential to choose short-term strains which adapt well to the soil, and which are resistant to pests and insects. In the past, we used to plant the 73—2 and IR 30 varieties for these two crops. Now we have got more pest-tolerant strains like the Nong Nghiep 3A or the 7A and M. TL 32. These varieties have helped solve the questions of planting time and given high yields on a rather large area.

## Rice Fertility in the Treble-Cropping Regime

An inexperienced agronomist might think that the treble-cropping regime in Quang Nam—Da Nang would cause constant immersion of the fields and thus prevent the activity of micro-organisms in the soil, and consequently the fertility of the soil would be drained quickly.

But one thing should be borne in mind: the climate in the region is favourable for the drying of the soil before planting of both the spring-summer rice and the third rice crop. In both periods, the sun is usually very hot and humidity very low which favours the plough-

ing as well as the drying of the soil. So, even with three crops of rice a year there are still two periods in a year for the soil to dry. The activity of micro-organism is assured and the main nutritive substances like nitrogen and phosphorus remain highly soluble.

Another debatable point is: will rice productivity drop because too large an amount of nutritive substance in the soil is consumed by the rice plants? Reality in the past seven years shows that the contrary has happened, and we expect rice productivity to continue to rise. For instance, last year the yield of winter-spring rice in Dai Loc district was 4,552 kilos per hectare and the rice plants in the current winter-spring crop look much better than last year. That is because we spread more manure on all the three crops and we did it in good time. In the southern districts of the province, we spread 5—6 tonnes of fertilizer on each crop which makes 15—18 tonnes in the whole year. In the northern districts, we spread 8—10 tonnes on each crop which makes 20—30 tonnes annually. In some of the frontrank co-ops like Dai Phuoc and Dien Tho 3, the farmers have spread 15—20 tonnes per hectare on the winter-spring crop, 12—15 tonnes on the spring-summer crop and 8—10 tonnes on the third crop. In addition, all the co-ops have spread 300—400 kilos of nitrogenous sulfate, 300—400 kilos of lime and 200—300 kilos of phosphate on each hectare, that is enough to restore to the soil what nutrients it has lost. In addition to the amount of silt deposited by the rivers during the flood season, the fertility of the fields is also continuously replenished by an important amount of humus supplied by the straw left uncut after each

# SOUTH VIETNAM EIGHT YEARS AFTER LIBERATION

crop, at the rate of about 80 tonnes per hectare each year.

## Plant Protection

The planting of three successive crops in a year has created propitious conditions for the thriving of insects and crop pests. That is why plant protection is one of our major preoccupations. A very closely organized system of plant protection has been set up from the province to the districts and the cooperatives to enforce a full-cycle pest prevention and combat program, with emphasis on prevention. Thanks to this, we have been able to check and put down many major outbreaks of pests as well as rat invasions. The farmers are used to a careful treatment of seeds. Apart from spraying insecticide on the sowing beds, they also bathe the rice seedlings in a solution of DDT. The use of lamps to catch winged insects, leaf-rollers and plant hoppers, etc., has also become a common practice in the region. In almost all co-ops the farmers have made use of their long experience in the fight against rats, which is also an important measure of plant protection in our province. In particular, the quick expansion of the area of pest-tolerant rice strains has helped Quang Nam—Da Nang overcome the scourge of brown planthopper which has caused significant losses in other places in the country. The strict observance of the cultivation time-table has also been an effective method of plant protection.

All that combined with the rational use of chemicals and vegetal insecticide have ensured a reasonable degree of security for

all the three crops. So far, no significant loss caused by insects or pests has been reported.

## The Problem of Irrigation

Needless to say, water is the foremost condition for treble cropping. In Quang Nam—Da Nang, in the wet season, the rains are often accompanied by floods and storms. The wet season lasts from January to the end of August, from the middle of the winter-spring rice crop, throughout the spring-summer crop until the middle of the third crop. Accordingly, we must ensure adequate water for all the three crops in all circumstances. In the past years, the farmers in our province have concentrated manpower and materials on building irrigation works of various sizes combined with the digging of wells and ponds and the use of the primitive method of watering with scoops. The success of treble cropping is also a success of the irrigation campaign in Quang Nam—Da Nang.

## Impact of the Contract System

To grow three crops in a year on the same fields involves periods of very great stress on the fields, especially during the harvest of the winter-spring rice, the ploughing and harvest of the spring-summer rice as well as the ploughing and planting of the third crop. The cooperative farmers usually have to work between 12 and 15 hours a day but even so the auxiliary workforce in the families has to be mobilized to keep up with the planting time-table. Treble cropping also requires a high level of

intensive farming at all stages, from fertilizer, irrigation, tending of the crop to the prevention and combat against insects and pests.

The contract system applied to each family of farmers has helped solve this problem by stimulating their interest in everything they plant on the fields. The contract system pushed rice productivity up visibly in all the three crops of 1981 and 1982. On the other hand, this system has its own drawback since it is liable to encourage casual and free-wheeling work among the farmers. However, we have taken careful measures to prevent and reduce such practices. Today, the contract system has really become a positive factor to help overcome the difficulties and obstacles which used to hamper our work in the past.

Our success in both aspects of rice production—area and productivity—in the practice of treble cropping in the past seven years has a bearing on the political, ideological and economic life of the local population. It is a major policy and a long-term orientation for food production of our province. It is the outcome of an imaginative application of the achievements of the biological revolution, a rational exploitation of the local natural potential and resources, and also of a clever application of scientific and technological advances now being widely popularized in the country.

At present, the treble-cropping regime has become a popular practice of Quang Nam—Da Nang and is exerting considerable influence on the life in the countryside.

NGUYEN MINH  
Director, Agricultural  
Service of Da Nang

# «BUONG» LEAVES in THUAN HAI

Besides some well-known products such as cuttlefish from Mui Ne, fish sauce from Phan Thiet, salt from Ca Na and cotton, Thuan Hai (a southernmost province of Central Vietnam) has a special tree called *buong* (*corypha lecomtei*). Its leaves are used to make many useful, attractive and inexpensive goods.

The tree is particularly abundant in Ham Tan and Duc Linh districts. Here it grows on hill-sides and vast clearings, which are sunny but well-aerated — the natural climatic features of Central Vietnam. The leaves here are known as “clearing leaves”. In the northern part of the province such as in Bac Binh district, the tree grows under the foliage of other trees there and its leaves are called “shadowy leaves”. The difference between the two is that if they are cut and dried on the same day, the “clearing leaves” are whiter and smoother and longer-lasting than the “shadowy leaves” which are light yellow and rather rough.

As yet the tree grows wild. Some botanists in Thuan Hai have experimented with planting its seeds on some hectares but without success. According to local people, this tree cannot be germinated by man, but when the wind blows, the ripened fruits break open, and the seeds fall out. They are carried everywhere by rain, and, after some time, germinate and become saplings.

Areas abounding in *buong* trees are popularly called “leaves forests”. During the wars of resistance, our soldiers used these leaves as camouflage, and to build makeshift

dwelling places in the maquis, to make bags for transporting rice to the front, and ropes and sails for boats to carry arms along the coast. Now these leaves are used as roofing materials, partition walls and doors... People also use them to make bags and raincoats. Big tree trunks are used to make chopsticks or incense-burners.

After national reunification, with the guidance and help of the communal People's Committee and the Export Service of Thuan Hai province, Tran Quang Dieu, a demobilized army officer, mobilized the people into a handicraft cooperative. So the Quang Canh cooperative was founded; its main material being *buong* leaves. First they produced mats made of *buong* leaves and now 20 different kinds of coloured bags are produced on commission from abroad.

Two new items very much appreciated by foreign customers are the “travelling bag-mats” and sunshades. The “travelling bag-mat” has 12 pockets to keep the traveller's clothes and belongings. It suffices to press two buttons and the bag is spread open into a nice and colourful mat for the beach. It can be folded back into a rectangular-shaped bag.

The sunshade made of *buong* leaves is quite a novelty. In the past, the nylon sunshades used on Nha Trang and Vung Tau beaches were usually imported from Hong Kong. On the suggestion of Vietnam Tourism, the Quang Canh cooperative makes such sunshades to replace the nylon ones. The 8-section mushroom-shaped sunshade is 2 metres in diameter. Its pole is made of *bang lang* wood, which is plentiful in the immense forests in Thuan Hai. In comparison with the nylon sunshades previously used which cost 400 dollars each those made by the Quang Canh cooperative are much cheaper and longer-lasting with sea air. Their wooden poles do not get rusty. They give a cooler shade and add a local trait to the landscape.

It is expected that new and attractive products of *buong* leaves will be made to cater for both home use and for export.

THANH CHAN

On a visit to Tien Giang province in the Mekong River delta on the occasion of the 8th anniversary of the liberation of South Vietnam, we were invited to spend a night in a “new economic zone”. The name derives from the fact that not long ago this area in Cai Lay district was still uncultivable due to the strong alum content of its soil, so much so that no breeder fish survived after they were placed in the ponds. As for the crops, the only plant that has ever been cultivated is the pumpkin (hence perhaps the name Go Bi—Pumpkin Mound—given to this hamlet). Contrary to the popular concept of a hard life associated with a “new economic zone”, this place gave no impression of privation or desolation. In the rumbling of a diesel motor and in the reverberation of the lights from the distant stockbreeding centre, Ba Khang, director of the Tien Giang Import—Export Company, took us for a tour of his enterprise, one of the many success stories of the province's foreign trade service.

We followed newly-built dykes and small irrigation ditches along which young trees had been freshly planted, then crossed small wooden bridges mounted with firm and gracious rails. As we continued our leisurely walk, Ba Khang spoke about his coconut and custard-apple trees grafted to *binh bat* trees, the groves of bananas and the rows of crossbred jujube tree. Except for the bananas which had begun to yield (21,000 *dong* worth of bananas from 5,000 groves), all the other trees were still young. But there was no doubt as to their continued thriving on this once arid land. On the clean cement floor of the piggery, the pigs were in deep slumber, each of the order of two hundred kilograms. They seemed unperturbed by our talk and tread. Only a few slightly wagged their tiny tails or uttered a few short grunts without opening their eyes. The pig farm was officially commissioned in 1980 with an initial personnel of 40 cadres and workers which now has been reduced to 25. After three years, the farm has recovered more than a million *dong*, or one-third of its initial investments, and is expected to operate with a profit, beginning 1985.

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# THE AP BAC SPIRIT

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That night we spent most of our time talking about the trees, crops and animals and the new way of doing business. The next morning we stood on the dyke and looked down at a cemetery lying some distance away amongst the paddy fields with a clear inscription reading "Cemetery of Fallen Heroes of the Homeland". Many of the tombstones were already covered with moss. In both wars of resistance, first against the French and then the Americans, this place was a key resistance base in the South. For the Americans and their puppets, it was a "free fire zone". Nobody could tell how many of our comrades and compatriots had fallen here. They came from all parts of the country, South, North and the Centre. "The houses you see yonder are all families of fallen heroes," Ba Khang said.

To some extent, it can be said that this small farm, which is no larger than ten hectares of which only 70% is exploitable, is a miniature of Tien Giang province itself. The farm, like the province, has gone through traumatic experiences, groping and even failing, but has finally built for itself a firm starting point from which to go forward. That starting point, as has been asserted, is agriculture.

Tien Giang province was one of the hottest spots of the Mekong River delta in both wars of resistance.

In the fight against the American aggressors, of all the villages in the province, only one did not help the armed resistance movement. 40,000 families each lost at least one member in the fight. Le Van Pham, member of the Party Central Committee and secretary of the Party Committee of Tien Giang, said to us: "The tradition of the population in our province is to cling to their land and fight to the end in whatever circumstances. That is one of our price-

less assets because it is the basis to continuously promote the revolutionary movement."

A thing which has escaped the attention of many is that this province which lies in the heart of the Mekong delta has one of the highest population densities in the whole country, second only to the three Red River delta province of Thai Binh, Ha Nam Ninh and Hai Hung. Its territory, though not large, has long been exploited. Historians say that at the end of the 17th century the first Vietnamese settlers came there and began reclaiming waste land with their rudimentary sickles and big blade knives. Many plants and animals, either indigenous or brought from other areas, under the care of industrious farmers and blessed by a favourable climate, thrived and multiplied quickly to create the first bases for the now famous "Orchard Land" and the rich "Paddy Land" supplemented by a rich resource in fish and shrimps. The province stretches more than one hundred kilometres along a main waterway and highway linking the three eastern provinces with the three western provinces and connecting Saigon—Cholon with Phnom Penh in Kampuchea. It also boasts the Saigon—My Tho railway, the earliest built by the French in Indochina. At the turn of this century, Tien Giang was already a major communication and trading centre. Traditionally rice growers, the population of Tien Giang also practise a variety of crafts. They are a dynamic lot, very sensitive to the new and are always concerned with efficiency in any work they undertake. The province's handicap lies in its serious shortage of raw materials, from coal, cement and steel to timber, stone and sand. Industry remains inchoate. Small industries, handicrafts and processing industries are mostly primitive. Meanwhile, the new

intensive farming methods demand much more chemical fertilizer, insecticide, machinery, fuel and spare parts. In the old regime, it was apt to say that "no sooner has Saigon—Cholon sneezed than My Tho and Gô Cong (both major towns in Tien Giang) have a runny nose". Understandably enough, there were not many managerial cadres when the war ended. The Party bases and the mass organisations were dangerously weak since many Party cadres had been killed in the war. The joy of liberation was exhilarating but many new problems had surfaced which needed quick solutions. Tien Giang was entering a new stage of its history.

Eight years is a short time in the history of a nation. But in this short time Tien Giang has gone through many stages of development. It began with long months of coping with the sequels of the war to restore production, followed by hard battles against natural calamities: widespread invasion by brown planthoppers, then the biggest flood in seven or eight decades, and finally the border war launched by Pol Pot's troops. These difficulties were compounded by some erroneous tendencies in socialist transformation and the limitations brought about by the old system of economic operation based solely on government subsidies without consideration for cost and profit. In the past few years, drawing on its own experiences and learning from the lessons of other localities in their common changes, Tien Giang has made steady steps forward. After restoring to production 30,000 hectares of paddy fields left waste during the war and promoting intensive cultivation, rice production in the province rose by more than 42% while the number of pigs and aquatic products almost doubled. In 1982 Tien Giang supplied to the country 110,000 tonnes of rice, i.e. 2.3 times more than in 1976 or an average of 1.5 more tonnes from each hectare of cultivated land. Gross product almost doubled and the income per head of population increased by 60%. Socialist transformation of agriculture is being stepped up with 15,000 hectares of land having been redistributed among the peasants. So far, 27%

of the area and 36% of the peasant households have opted for collective farming. Each week has seen more production collectives come into being. These collectives are being strengthened and more and more cadres for the future agricultural cooperatives are being trained with a view to basic completion of cooperativisation in 1984.

Paddy share per inhabitant now stands at 525 kilos a year. The food problem has been basically solved while the face of the countryside is changing daily. Under the guideline of combining efforts of the government with those of the population, many new establishments in service of production and circulation of goods and many cultural and public utility projects have been set up. Investments in production last year rose to 100 million dong of which 20 millions were contributed by the State. Every village in the province is striving to build its own school, health station and a new administrative office (these three establishments are regarded by many as symbols of the new regime). One village has even built a 1,000-seat open-air theatre which meets the cultural needs of the population while increasing the village's revenue. In fact, the proceeds of the performances here have been used for the building of a fairly large health station. Tien Giang is steadily advancing to the goals mapped out by the 5th Party Congress: step by step solve the questions of food, housing, clothing, education and health care for the entire population.

The economic plan of the province has been concretized in six programs which combine production with processing and circulation of goods, and is based on the creation of socio-economic zones composed of the State, collective and family sectors. These are the programs of high-yield rice; planting and exploiting more than 35,000 hectares of orchards, industrial plants; systematic exploitation of the coastal, riparian and sea areas; develop-

ment of industries, small industries and handicrafts, and planting rubber trees.

Never has this fertile land seen such sweeping changes as today. The traditional orchards including 2,000 hectares of banana trees destined for export are being reconditioned. Sugarcane and coconut trees which used to be grown scattered in family plots are being grouped into major plantations. In one particular year, the coconut plantations occupied 5,000 hectares and yielded 70 million fruit. Tien Giang has also grown many plants which were not grown before such as pineapple, soybean, rush and cajeput...

The evening breeze from the Tien river which used to bring the fragrance of ripe fruits now also carries the sweet odour of sugar molasses produced at hand-craft sugar kilns.

Early this year, Tien Giang celebrated the 20th anniversary of the Ap Bac victory (January 2, 1963) over the so-called heli-borne and armour-borne tactics so loudly vaunted by the US, putting an end to the US strategy of "special war" whereby it attempted to crush the Vietnamese revolution by the hand of the puppet army. Ap Bac was not a major military operation, nor were the forces involved and the enemy losses very important. However, moved by an iron determination and prodigious resourcefulness, firmly grasping the Party policy and making clever use of the combined strength of its revolutionary forces, it did create a new relation of force in the province and exerted a strong psychological impact on the whole situation of South Vietnam at that time. Today, receptive to the new in the Resolution of the Fifth Party Congress and the other resolutions of the Party Central Committee, bringing into play the people's dynamism and creativeness and proceeding from the practice of their locality, the leaders of Tien Giang are acting with precision and great efficiency. Tien Giang is moving ahead in all spheres and at a steady pace.

PHAN QUANG

# BUON MA THUOT TODAY

*Lying at the centre of the Central Highlands red basalt area at 500 metres above sea level, 190 km west of Nha Trang, 200 km south of Pleiku and 350 km from Ho Chi Minh City, Buon Ma Thuot has an important position as regards politics, economy, culture and national defence.*

*Since the early years of this century Buon Ma Thuot has been the chief town of Dac Lac plateau. For quite a long period this region was the fief of Resident Sabatier, an ambitious French colonialist, who styled himself Marina the First, "king of Se Dang" in the north of the Central Highlands, for his skill in sword-play.*

*When the French colonialists from the North carried out the pacification of the plateau they wanted to establish the chief town of Dac Lac province at present-day Buon Don. However, tribal chief Khuon Giu Nop, who surrendered to the French at that time, proposed that they chose Buon Ma Thuot (or Village of Father Y Thuot in Ede language), 60 km east of Buon Don. Since Buon Ma Thuot appeared on the maps, French capitalists rushed to Dac Lac to set up coffee and rubber plantations while the Kinh and the Hoa people also went there to earn a living.*

*Before the August 1945 Revolution, many revolutionary fighters were jailed in Buon Ma Thuot prison only to die in that unhealthy place.*

Since 1954, and more particularly since 1957, the Ngo Dinh Diem administration sent lowlanders en masse to Dac Lac to build agricultural settlements, coffee plantations or forestry sites.

The artificial prosperity of Buon Ma Thuot before liberation was typical of the southern towns dependent upon the US war of aggression and expeditionary corps. Here many grave sequels were left by neo-colonialism: rampant unemployment when the puppet army and administration collapsed; high proportion of non-productive people; nostalgia for the "golden time" owing to US aid among a part of the population; parasitic life of many young people. Moreover, the cut of 50,000-60,000 tonnes of rice from Thailand and Saigon caused no small difficulty to a region specializing in industrial crops and forestry which had to set about healing the wounds of war, restoring and developing production.

Tremendous indeed are the changes Buon Ma Thuot has undergone in the eight years since liberation. The 8 or 10 m wide roads linking the town to the districts and the new economic zones create favourable conditions for the movement of people and goods. Many enterprises have sprung up, like the Thong Nhat engineering works, the Sao Vang rubber factory, the car repair workshop, the floor timber mill for export, the wood-processing factories in Buon Me Thuot and Hoa Binh, the sauce factory... which are turning a consumer town into a productive one. The townsfolk, who formerly used US or Japanese goods, now have at their disposal bike and motorbike tyres, reed mats, soaps, toothpaste, household utensils, still

lacking in number and quality, but nevertheless precious, for they are made by ourselves. The conspicuous and deepest change is offered by agriculture. For those who visit Buon Ma Thuot for the first time the six months of rain with verdant vegetation suggest a thriving country while the following six months of dry season with a clear sky and a swirling red dust bespeak a parched land. Water therefore was the first problem facing the revolutionary administration and people of the town. As far back as late 1975 in the drive to build irrigation works Buon Ma Thuot mobilized the population of all nationalities to excavate many kilometres of canals, thus bringing about a basic change in agriculture and doing away with the nationalities' fixation that farming is only possible in the rainy season while the dry season is a punishment from Heaven. From having no wet rice in winter-spring, Buon Ma Thuot now has more than 2,000 hectares of double-cropping. In 1976 the townspeople had to ask for a State subsidy of 1,500 tonnes of rice but this is now a thing of the past. Tens of thousands of townsfolk have moved to Chu Dut, E Keo, Hoa Khanh and Chu Kmia to build regions specialized in high-yield wet-rice growing, in sugarcane, maize, peanuts, beans, bringing affluence and well-being to their beloved town.

Since 1979, Buon Ma Thuot has basically eradicated illiteracy. At present, one in four people goes to school. The Central Highlands University, Teacher-Training College, Institute of Hygiene and Epidemiology, Institute of Research on Coffee, Secondary Schools of

Agriculture, Medicine, Hydraulics, Engineering and Electricity... draw thousands of sons and daughters of the minorities to come and study, thus making the town a cultural, scientific and technical centre of the vast Highlands. Every ward and village has a medical station, malaria has been curbed; cultural and artistic life is more hectic than ever, cinema reaches the remotest villages and the new economic zones; social evils and superstitions are gradually being wiped out; public security and social order are better day by day. Increasing efforts are being made to achieve quicker and better results with the motto: Let the State and the people, the central and the regional authorities work together. The Ede youngster clad with a loincloth before the August 1945 Revolution, who went to the dirt road linking Ninh Hoa and this remote western town to welcome a Kinh teacher coming from the plain is now Professor Doctor Y Tham Cobna, Director of the Central Highlands University.

Thousands of engineers, doctors, teachers, socialist intellectuals from various parts of the country have volunteered to live and work here. From tens of Party members before liberation the province now has thousands of Party members among its best sons and daughters united as one and fighting under the banner of beloved Uncle Ho's Party, with the determination to lead the people of the minorities here in the socialist revolution. A plan has been adopted to erect at the main crossroads of the town a big memorial to commemorate the historic victory of Buon Ma Thuot.

LE THAU

# THE MEKONG RIVER DELTA

## THE MEKONG RIVER

## IN NAM BO

Taking its rise in the perpetual snowy mountain region of Tibet, the Mekong river flows through five countries before watering the Nam Bo (Southern Vietnam) delta. It is one of the ten biggest rivers in the world and has in some regions an alluvial layer as thick as seventy metres. Its hydrographic regime exerts a great influence on the flora and the millions of people living on its banks.

It is not accidental that the word Me<sup>1</sup> (Mekong) means Mother, as it can be said without exaggeration that without this river, there would not be such a bustling life of the riparian population.

From its rise in Tibet to the Vietnamese coast line, the Mekong river has a length of 4,200 kilometres and a catchment basin of 795,000 square kilometres, more than double the size of Vietnam. In its upper reaches it flows through two countries, China and Burma. In its lower reaches, it flows through four countries totaling an area of 620,000 square kilometres, with its summit at Kratié (Kampuchea). This delta is divided into two regions, the lower region including Nam Bo has the Tonle Sap in Kampuchea, as its main depression.

Basing themselves on vestiges left by ancient terraces and lakes, geographers presume that the Mekong river formerly flowed in Eastern Nam Bo. After this region was raised, it shifted its course southward and at first emptied into the Gulf of Thailand. However, due to the effects of flexure which took the northwest-southeast direction,

it changed, its course at Phnom Penh and since then runs in the present direction.

In the paleozoic era, the Nam Bo plain was a big trench subjected to a gradual subsidence causing the invasion of the sea which transformed the plain in Nam Bo and Kampuchea into an immense gulf.

### The Flow of the River

The water of the Mekong river is fed by snow, monsoon rain and typhoons.

The rainy season corresponds to the southwesterly monsoon, which takes place from May to October. The dry season falls in with the northeasterly wind and occurs from November to April. The annual rainfall of 1,672 millimetres is irregularly distributed according to the season and region. It is 88% in the six months of the rainy season. September is the wettest month. On the western flank of the Truong Son range a yearly rainfall of 4,000 millimetres is recorded in some regions while in others it is only 1,000 millimetres.

With the sunny weather in May and June, snow begins to melt and the early rain begins to fall, thus swelling the water of the Mekong river and causing the regular flood which reaches its peak in September. In this period a typical phenomenon is observed: at Kratié, the summit of the Mekong delta, the flow of this river is 14,000 cubic metres per second; only one-fifth of this huge flow comes from the upper reaches, while the remaining

derives from the rain falling in the region: this is a normal flow. In 1939, the year in which the Mekong experienced the heaviest flood in fifty years, at Kratié town, a flow of up to 73,000 cubic metres/second was recorded.

But the powerful river does not flow directly to the sea. At Phnom Penh, it takes another direction and its water is stored in an immense but shallow lake—the Tonle Sap—whose area broadens with the water level, from 3,000 square kilometres in the dry season, to 10,000 square kilometres in the flood season. When the water rises to 11 metres above sea level, the volume of water stored in the lake amounts to 72 billion cubic metres. According to experts' calculations, every year, from June to mid-September or early October, the Mekong river pours about 19% of its water into the Tonle Sap, which thus plays the role of regulator of the flow of the Mekong in the dry season. In 1961, the water carried to the Tonle Sap amounted to over 60 billion cubic metres. After the flood season, the volume of water discharged by this lake totals nearly 89 billion cubic metres.

When the water of the Mekong at Kompong Cham rises to 13 metres above sea level, it overflows its banks and submerges the surrounding plains. At the end of the flood, most of this water returns to the Mekong, the rest flows into the Rach Gia bay or to the Vam Co river and inundates the Dong Thap plain.

Thanks to the Tonle Sap and low-lying lands along the river which



play the role of water reservoirs, the Mekong's velocity is greatly reduced when it reaches the delta.

In the big flood of 1961, this velocity reached its height with 62,400 cubic metres/second at Kratié, 49,700 at Phnom Penh and 36,700 at Tan Chau—Chau Doc; the water level was 16 metres at Kratié, 13 metres at Kompong Cham, 9 metres at Phnom Penh, 4 metres at Tan Chau—Chau Doc, 1.5 metres at Long Xuyen and 0.8 metre at Can Tho.

In the flood season, at Phnom Penh, the flow of the Hau river, a branch of the Mekong, is only one-fourth of the Tien river; but at An Giang 40% of the water of the Tien river pour, through the Vam Nao river, into the Hau river, making the flows of these two rivers well nigh equal.

This natural regulation explains why in the rainy season, the Mekong carries such a huge volume of water, but causes no devastating flood in Nam Bo.

Those who have visited Western Nam Bo in the flood season remember the scene of the Mekong flowing swiftly, the immense plain submerged under water, and houses and gardens seemingly floating on the surface of water.

Every year in the flood season, the Mekong inundates from 1.3 to 1.4 million hectares of the Nam Bo plain<sup>2</sup>. This flooded area is bordered to the north by the Vietnam—Kampuchea frontier, to the east by the Vam Co Dong river, to the south by the interprovincial road from Duc Long to Ben Nhut and to the west by the road linking Ben Nhut to Ha Tien, passing through Rach Gia.

This area can be subdivided into three smaller regions, namely, the Dong Thap plain in the north, the region hemmed in between the Tien river and Hau river, and the region on the right bank of the Hau river.

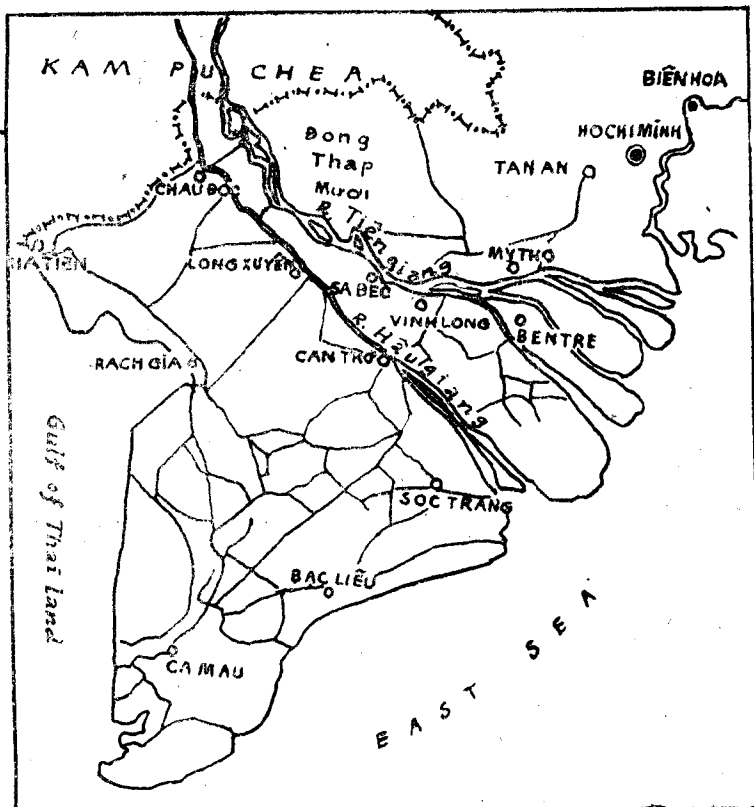
The Stung Lot river in Kampuchea is divided into two branches

at the Vietnamese frontier; one branch, the Hong Ngu river, empties into the Tien river, another, the So Ha river, waters the Dong Thap plain. Together with the Cai Cai canal, in the year of heavy flood, the So Ha river carries water to the Dong Thap plain with a flow of 2,850 cubic metres/second. On the other hand the tributaries of the Tien river down Phong My also spread their water to Dong Thap. In addition to the rain falling in the region, these two sources of water turn this immense plain of 670,000 hectares into a water reservoir from July to December (for the raised land along the river) and even to February (for the land as high as one metre above sea level). With regard to the regions less than one metre above sea level, they are practically submerged under water all the year round.

The region sandwiched between the Tien river and Hau river, about one hundred thousand hectares, is submerged for five months by the water carried by the canals which from Kampuchea cross the road linking Chau Giang to Tan Chau and by the water overflowing the Tien river and Hau river.

In this region, the flooded area amounts to 600,000 hectares, from the river to the coast of Rach Gia and Ha Tien. It is divided into two small regions. If we take Cai San as limit, the northwestern side is occupied by a rectangular plain, half a million hectares, usually called the Long Xuyen quadrangle (so called as it is marked at the angles by four big towns: Long Xuyen, Chau Doc, Rach Gia and Ha Tien). The plain is only 0.8 metre—1 metre above sea level, except the strips of land running along the Hau river bank and the Rach Gia seacoast. East of Ha Tien town, the surface of the ricefield is only 0.2 metre higher than sea level. This immense flat plain is dominated in the middle by the peaks of the That Son range which offers a majestic spectacle in the flood season.

Every year, the Long Xuyen quadrangle is submerged by three currents of water: from Kampuchea; from the Hau river through canals; and rainfall. From July to December or January, most of this region is 1.5—2 metres and even



3 metres under water; the low-lying lands are more deeply submerged. With the Dong Thap plain, the Long Xuyen quadrangle is the largest flooded area.

The remaining part, delimited by the interprovincial roads linking Can Tho to Duc Long, Ben Nhut and Rach Gia, is as large as 110,000 hectares. It is submerged by the water of the quadrangle and of the Hau river carried through the Thot Not, O Mon, Binh Thuy and Can Tho canals. In this region the flood water is only half a metre deep and recedes rapidly. Part of the water is evacuated to the Western sea by the Cai Lon river and another part flows to the Hau river when its water abates, and back to the Mekong river.

To cope with these natural conditions our peasants practise an original farming method. At the end of the 19th century, almost all the heavily flooded lands were left fallow. Only one rice crop was grown in a year in the fields drained from flood water. But the population grew rapidly and the colonialists needed rice for export. In 1895, they introduced a variety of floating rice suitable for submerged fields. Within a few years the areas planted to this rice amounted to over half a million hectares. In shallow flooded fields, the transplanting method was used after the young rice plants were strong. About 300,000 hectares of this transplanted rice were grown. Although this is a laborious method, it gives a yield higher than that of the floating rice.

### The Waterway Network

At Phnom Penh, the Mekong river bifurcates. At Vinh Long town, 100 kilometres from the sea, the Tien river is divided into the My Tho river and Co Chien river. The My Tho river is subdivided into a big branch, the Ham Luong river, and three smaller rivers.

This waterway group has the shape of a fan. Some parts are swollen, others shrink. The swollen sections are beaded with long islands.

The Hau river flows to the sea in a single course. Geologists hold

that this course corresponds to a series of underground cracks. Near the sea it is divided into three mouths forming two islets between the mouths.

In the flood season, the Mekong river carries a quantity of alluvium inferior to that of the Red river. However, as it carries 500 billion cubic metres of water a year, the alluvial deposit is about one billion tonnes or seven times that of the Red river. This is a most precious gift granted by Nature to our Mekong delta provinces.

Like all rivers in monsoon swept countries, the Mekong flows quite irregularly in the dry season and rainy season. According to data supplied by the International Mekong River Committee, in the rainy season of 1961, the flow of this river at Tan Chau—Chau Doc<sup>3</sup> was 36,700 cubic metres/second (while it was 3,900 cubic metres in February, 2,700 cubic metres in March and 2,100 cubic metres in April, the last month of the dry season). This phenomenon has been observed 75 times in one hundred years.

This flow of 2,100 cubic metres/second causes a headache to the hydrographers as in April all sources of water are exhausted, and rivers run dry due to the evaporation of water caused by the tropical sun. It is precisely at that time that the winter-spring rice crop is about to be harvested and the summer-autumn rice crop begins to grow: these two short-term crops give a yield far higher than that of the strains generally used in the region. To irrigate one hectare of ricefield, a flow of one cubic metre of water per second is necessary. But the flow of 2,100 cubic metres of the Mekong is only sufficient to water about one million hectares of land, as, of course, we cannot draw water down to the river bed.

As a consequence, in the rainy season, the Mekong causes the submersion of 1.3 million hectares of land while in the dry season it has water to irrigate only one-third of the three million hectares of the delta. This is the whim of nature in a region favoured in rice production.

In the dry season, when the water of rivers subsides and rain is

scarce, sea water invades the rice-fields and alkalinity makes its appearance, thus preventing the growth of the riceplants.

In its southern part, the East Sea is subjected to a twice-daily tidal regime. In 24 hours there are two ebbs and two flows; the spring tide is 1.5 metres, the difference between the ebb and flow is over 3 metres; the river bed is flat, wide and deep; thus the ebb is very powerful, particularly in the dry season. In the south the tide has nearly the same level as in the north. But in Hanoi, 180 kilometres from the sea, the influence of the tide is not felt. Reversely, in the dry season, above Kratié town, 500 kilometres from the sea, the tide raises the water level by 0.4 metre. Even in the flood season, Phnom Penh capital, 370 kilometres far from the sea, still feels the effects of the tide.

The flow brings sea water deep into the delta. Through the My Tho river, this water reaches as far as Dong Tam, a locality 70 kilometres from the sea; by the Ham Luong river, it penetrates 5 kilometres above Ben Tre town and 55 kilometres in the hinterland. Through the Hau river, it reaches 10 kilometres above Dai Ngai. In the Vam Co river, sea water makes its presence felt as far as Tan An town.

In the dry season, the small rivers are not replenished with fresh water, but through the mazy network of canals and rivers, sea water is free to invade the delta.

The twice-daily tidal regime exerts a great influence on the flow of rivers when the tide rises and falls; it deepens the river beds near the sea and widens the mouths of canals. We can imagine that to get a difference of 3 metres between the spring tide and neap tide, the time necessary is 12 hours in the north as the East Sea follows a daily tidal regime, and 6 hours in the south as the tidal regime is twice daily; with the same inclination, the flow of rivers in the south is twice as swift than that in the north.

The broadening of the mouths of canals under the effects of the tide causes waste of farmland. The deepening of river beds near the sea creates difficulty in the building

of dykes and culverts. Cuu Long province needs to erect 60 sea dykes, but nowhere is the river bed under 8 metres deep. In the Kien Giang bay in the west, the spring tide is only 0.3 metre above sea-level and the difference between the flow and ebb is one metre. The penetration of sea water in the delta is not deep. Above the Rach Gia—Ha Tien canal, it is only 3—5 kilometres.

In the Ca Mau peninsula, through the Ganh Hao and My Chanh rivers, it reaches two-thirds of the Quan Lo—Phung Hiem canal and threatens 700,000 hectares of rice-fields.

The deep invasion of sea water in the delta salts 1.1 million hectares of land (300,000 hectares in particular). This is another inconvenience of the Mekong delta for agriculture.

Owing to the flatness of the plain and difference of the tide in the East Sea and the Gulf of Thailand, the Ca Mau tip has an original hydrography. The Cua Lon river crosses this region from east to west. According to the tidal level the water of the Kien Giang bay flows to the East Sea and vice-versa, and assaults the coast line green with *dua nuoc* (*Nipa frutescens*) and mangrove. At high tide, the water of the Ong Trang river (in the west) does not flow from the sea to the hinterland as is usual, but from the river to the sea. This is because the high tide of the East Sea is so powerful that it follows the Bo De river to flow back to the Gulf of Thailand and overtakes the tide there. At ebb tide, the sea water from the Ong Trang river flows into the Cua Lon river and through the Tam Giang influence and the Bo De river to the East Sea. That is why the story runs in the region that water flows to the sea at high tide and from the sea to the hinterland at low tide.

In the Ca Mau peninsula, the plain is so flat that many small rivers rise in the swamps or cajuput forests which are only a little higher than sea level. A geographer remarked: it seems as if these rivers rise from the sea to flow to the hinterland. The rivers flow under the effects of the tide which engenders the flow and ebb and not because of the inclination of

their bed. The land is only a few metres above sea-level and the river banks are raised by salt alluvial deposits, this means that there is little hope of using the labyrinth of waterways in the region to solve the problem of fresh water for the population. The only way out is to store rain water on the spot and, through a hundred kilometre-long canal system, to bring water from the Hau river to the fields in the Ca Mau peninsula.

The Mekong river delta is criss-crossed by a maze-like network of rivers and canals. Even the local inhabitants are at a loss to know which are natural rivers and which are artificial dug canals. Our ancestors were the first to dig big canals, then the French continued their work with machines. Before the August 1945 revolution, the aggregate length of canals was much superior to that of all natural rivers put together. Even today, nobody, including the experts, knows how long they are. And the digging continues.

According to old documents, the length of dug canals in Nam Bo totals 2,500 kilometres, while that of natural rivers, 2,400 kilometres.

But a recent document puts this figure at 4,900 kilometres, including 1,575 kilometres of big canals from 18 to 60 metres wide<sup>5</sup>.

The real figures are probably bigger.

In a country provided with an extensive network of rivers and canals, as the Mekong river delta, the life of the inhabitants is subjected to the influence of the hydrologic regime of the big rivers, and the effects of the tide.

Except in the sections near the sea coast, generally speaking, a river flows to the sea, so sailing upstream is difficult. In the Mekong delta, almost all rivers are subjected to the effects of the tide. You can go downstream in any direction. It is enough to await the ebb-tide; anyhow in 24 hours you can go downstream for twelve hours; of course, if the ebb occurs at night, sailors and passengers are willing to sail in the dark.

Sometimes the tide pushes the current upstream and changes the flow of rivers. In the flat plains,

the rivers flow under the effects of the ebb and flow; where these two phenomena are observed and the water is stationary, there a lot of inns, restaurants, boarding-houses, markets and shops mushroom, and even a townlet makes its appearance, because it is there that the travellers take a rest, waiting for the ebb-tide.

To economically exploit Nam Bo, the French set great store by developing communications and transport. The Saigon—My Tho railway line was the first to be built in Indochina. It was inaugurated in 1883, even before the Court of Hue signed the Patenôtre treaty ceding the whole country to the French colonialists. Nevertheless, road and rail fails to compete successfully with waterways because the latter has long been the most practical means of transport and communications, covering 60% of the freight transported, not including the goods carried for short distances.

Grasping the role played by the waterways in Nam Bo, we can understand how important for the peasants is this means of conveyance, and why all the hamlets and villages are built facing the river bank.

PHAN QUANG

Next issue:

The Mekong river delta

#### Notes

1. Me Khoong, in Lao.
2. According to the photographs taken by airplanes on October 2, 1978, the big flood in that year submerged 1.4 million hectares of land (725,000 hectares of the Dong Thap plain, 230,000 hectares between the Tien river and Hau river, 445,000 hectares of the Long Xuyen quadrangle).
3. Tan Chau, on the Tien river, and Chau Doc, on the Hau river, are two Vietnamese towns built where the Mekong river enters Vietnamese territory.
4. "Hydrology of the Mekong river delta," document of the Institute of Planning of the Ministry of Water Conservancy.
5. Le Ba Thao, Nature in Vietnam.

# AN ANCIENT MONOGRAPH on the Mekong Delta

**Gia dinh thanh thong chi** (Monograph on Gia Dinh) was written by Trinh Hoai Duc around 1820. It is the oldest monograph on the southern part of Vietnam formerly known as Nam Ky Luc Tinh, the Six provinces of the South. It comprises about 17,000 Han characters and is divided into two parts, of three volumes each. Volume One deals with climatic and other natural conditions, Volume Two with the "rivers and mountains", Volume Three with the various regions, Volume Four with customs and habits, Volume Five with products, and Volume Six with the "towns and citadels". Except for Volume One, all other volumes are subdivided into chapters dealing with individual provinces: Phien An, Bien Hoa, Dinh Tuong, Vinh Thanh, Ha Tien, etc. Thus the book encompasses a very wide range of problems relating to the Mekong delta.

Trinh Hoai Duc, born in 1765, died five years after completing the monograph. He was one of the "Three Great Poets of Gia Dinh", the two others being Le Quang Dinh and Ngo Nhan Tinh. He knew the Mac, the leaders of Chinese immigrants living in Ha Tien; lived for a long time in Bien Hoa and Gia Dinh, and travelled widely in the Mekong delta. He was therefore in a position to write knowledgeably about the land and the people, for whom he felt great sympathy and affection. His **Gia dinh thanh thong chi** was a key reference book for historiographers of the Nguyen Court and the vademecum of Nguyen officials sent on administrative assignments to the South. The French colonial administration also set great store by it. The French naval officer Aubarès translated it into French and had the translation published in Paris. In our country it was translated into the vernacular by Nguyen Tao in 1972.

Trinh Hoai Duc's love of the land shows in the very first

volume of the monograph. About the climate, he says: "Warm weather all the year round, blooming flowers in all four seasons, everything the glamour of spring." He gives detailed indications about the monsoons, the "thunder and lightning, clouds and rains, fog and mist", his explanations of those natural phenomena being, however, based on the theories of yin-yang and the "five elements".

In Volume Two, he writes about the "rivers and mountains". About the unexplored wilderness he warns: "When working the oars of your boat you must beware of the crocodiles; in the swamps, watch out for leeches; in the forests, be cautious of ghosts and spirits." He describes hills and rivers, fields and canals. Viet, Khmer and Hoa settlers, he points out, lived on high-lying ground along the waterways, taking care to "plant stakes along the banks to stop the crocodiles". He praises the courage of "women and children who beat off tigers with flails". About the Dong Nai river, he warns against the "rocky rapids and turbulent waters of the upper reaches" but adds that in the lower reaches, "the river is wide and deep, its water fresh and pure, indeed the best water that you can get in the whole of Gia Dinh. If you use it either to wash your hair or infuse tea, you'll find that it is not surpassed by even the water of the Trung Linh and Bach Hac streams in China".

The rainy season begins in the 8th moon, he indicates. "The rain water cleans away all filth and flows through all fields, causing no flooding and no loss of life or property." For mineral resources, he mentions iron ore in Bien Hoa, flints in Thach Hoa, amber in Phu Quoc. Other resources include sea swallows' nests in Chau, Tre, and Thach Hoa islands, and numberless species of birds and fish. "Weirs are built across rivers to catch fish. Fish merchants keep

them in fresh water in the compartments of their large boats and get huge profits from their sale."

The author enthuses over the nimble hands of the craftsmen, makers of "supple and glossy silk fabrics", and designers of beautiful flower patterns. In Phu Quoc, "tortoise shell is made into pen holders, betel boxes, bracelets and bangles. Nodules on **ban lan** roots are shaped into figures of man and bird; or floral clusters. Coir from coconuts is twisted into strong ropes while coconut shells are turned into bowls, plates and vessels of various kinds, "liked by all". The author makes special mention of the art of boat building in such places as An Binh in present-day Tien Giang province.

In Volume Five, detailed mention is made of hundreds of kinds of products and figures are given about average yearly output: 40,000 **can** (one **can** equals 0.6 kilogram) of soya, 60,000 **can** of sugar, 30,000 **can** of cardamom, 100,000 **can** of pepper, 400,000 **can** of cotton, 30,000 **can** of beeswax, 50,000 **can** of holothurians, etc. He classes the fields into fertile and less fertile ones, indicates the crops that are suited to various kinds of soil, gives a cultivation calendar and details about yields. He also warns against poisonous plants and lists the medicinal properties of many plants, herbs and flowers.

The geographical positions and names of administrative divisions, down to hamlet level, are given together with their population numbers. The resulting picture of population distribution shows that settlements were the thickest along waterways, where the land was fertile and irrigation and drainage good. Many regions remained sparsely populated: Kien Giang counted only two cantons and eleven communes; Long Xuyen two cantons and 40 communes. Some areas were mostly Hoa (ethnic Chinese) settlements:

Cai Tau Thuong, Cai Tau Ha, Ha Tien, etc. Others had a wholly Khmer population. Trinh Hoai Duc's book helps present-day geographers locate old administrative divisions and supplies information on the formation of villages and communes, in which traditional patterns evolved and changed according to the natural conditions prevailing in the areas of settlement.

Water resources are carefully recorded. Detailed information is supplied with regard to the building of some projects: "In 1819 the An Thong or Saigon canal was dug, in which undertaking 11,460 labourers worked in three shifts. The canal is 2,129 tam, 1 thuoac long (9.5 miles), 15 tam wide, 9 thuoac deep. The work took from the 23rd day of the 2nd moon to the 23rd day of the 4th moon to complete." Another passage: "The Vinh Te canal, dug in 1819, is 205 miles long. Each month a labourer received 6 strings of coins and one vuong of rice. The work, begun on the 15th day of the 12th month of the year 1819, was completed on the 13th day of the 3rd month of 1820."

Trading is described in these terms: "Foreign merchant vessels would cast anchor at Cu Lao Pho, following which the foreign merchants would rent a house in the town where they would live during their stay. Native traders would make an inventory of the goods after they had been unloaded and prices would be discussed. The goods were bought wholesale, both those of superior and inferior quality. When the vessel was about to start on the return trip, the native traders would bring any goods the foreign merchants had ordered. Upon completion of the deal, there would be a lot of merry-making. Fresh water was loaded on the ship, barnacles scraped, and the ship's hold loaded with precious goods."

Market towns mushroomed. "At Cho Cay Da (Banyan Tree market), as early as the 3rd watch (3 a.m.), people flock to the market, which is flooded with light from lamps and torches. At Cho Ben Ca (Fish Port market), one can find everything, both native produce and foreign commodities as well as all kinds of seafood. At Cho Long Ho (Dragon and Tiger market), which was founded in 1732, street links up with street, stretching over five miles. Hundreds of kinds of commodities are sold and along the wharves boats and vessels jostle each other".

The author speaks of the people with affection and respect. "People here (in the Mekong delta) stand for loyalty, courage and purity of mind. They set greater store by virtue than wealth. This is the attitude of men and women alike. They worship Buddha, believe in the mediums, respect the gods." They were also very hospitable and acted upon this belief: "If you deprive yourself of food in order to feed a guest coming from afar, your own travelling husband will receive similar assistance from the people he meets on the road." Trinh Hoai Duc writes: "Whenever a visitor comes, the host will first offer him betel then treat him to a plentiful meal, regardless of whether he is a close relative or a stranger and whatever his place of origin. Travellers need not bring money and food along with them. Even people seeking refuge from administrative harassment on account of tax and corvée may find some place to live."

Here man was well adapted to natural conditions. Says Trinh Hoai Duc: "Nine people out of ten are good swimmers and skilled at handling boats... Along the waterways, there are well-established rules of traffic. For instance, in the case of two boats colliding, the one with the lighter load, or sailing downstream, or going too fast, will suffer a penalty." There were original customs in trading: "When buying fruit for instance, you get one additional fruit free for every ten you buy if the buying is done before the festival held on the fifth day of the fifth moon. After that date, you will get as many as three fruit for free." Market prices and fluctuations in supply are likewise recorded: "Salt is very cheap in Phuoc An; for one coin you may get as much as 100 can; but at the time of the Nguyen blockade against the Tay Son there was little to buy in the way of food. The price of rice rose steeply, salt became a rare condiment which you took along with you when you travelled and used very sparingly." The author is critical of the erratic weights and measures: "There is a strange habit at a certain place of saying 100 gia (bushels) when what you actually mean is only 10 gia. A can is of different weights depending on whether you use the tu ma can or the ordinary can. A thuoac is likewise of varying length. So you had better agree on the kind of measure you use before discussing the price."

Vestiges of the ancient communal life were well preserved in village activities and the running of its affairs: "A propitious day is selected for the (annual) ceremony to be held at the village communal house. On the eve of the ceremony, all villagers, young and old, must keep vigil throughout the night. The day of the ceremony, the village books are scrutinized, revenue and expenditure audited, crops assessed. The results are made public in the village council and village officials elected."

Games, entertainments, festivals, funerals, weddings, birth celebrations, dress styles, cooking and other domestic skills of women are depicted in detail. Thus "the husband of a woman who has just given birth to a child is exempted from all corvée for a period of one month so that he can look after her and the baby."

The author is a captivating writer who can do many things with equal ease: he can give either a detailed description with full indication of position, size, etc. or a vivid sketch full of life and feeling. He does not repeat himself in such passages as the description of mountains, rivers, and islands, which number in the hundred, and his stories about the folklore (catching a crocodile or chasing a tiger) are truly engrossing.

The author's background as a dignitary of the Nguyen Court accounts for many weaknesses. He says practically nothing about the miseries and humiliations suffered by the peasantry at the hands of the feudalists. He makes no suggestions as to how the country could be better administered. His geographical view are imbued with such antiquated theories as **Phong Thuy** (Wind and Water) and **Tam Tai** (Triad: Heaven, Earth, and Man). He is perhaps too fond of myths and legends. Worst of all, he blindly praises the Nguyen king Gia Long and his officials, and unwarrantedly blames the Tay Son for numberless "crimes".

Nevertheless his **Gia dinh thanh thong chi** remains a treasury of valuable information and documents.

NGUYEN THI THANH XUAN  
and DO NAM LIEN

# VIETNAMESE LITERATURE

## THROUGH TRANSLATION

During the 80-year colonial rule in Vietnam (1858—1945) "Annamese" literature was almost unknown abroad. The French in the colony were interested in it for political, religious and scientific reasons. Administrators, teachers, Catholic priests, members of learned societies such as the **Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient** and the **Société des Amis du Vieux Hue** translated a few works into French. Among the most noted authors were L. Cadière, G. Cordier, V. Barbier; M. Durand, R. Crayssac, Abel des Michels, G. Dumoutier, A. Landes, A. Chéon, etc. Annamese intellectuals also took part in the work; they were encouraged to build up a "colonial national" culture tied to the mother country: Truong Vinh Ky, Paulus Cua, Nguyen Van Vinh (translation of **Kieu** by Nguyen Du), Pham Quynh (Essays: the Tonkinese peasant through folk songs, 1930—Annamese Poetry, 1931), Le Van Phat (Legends and Tales of Annam, 1913).

From the beginning of World War I to the end of World War II there developed a Vietnamese literature written in the French language with a new trend, which had a limited readership. In this period there were the translations and adaptations of Vietnamese literary works by Hoang Xuan Nhi (The Lament of a Warrior's Wife, 1943), Nguyen Tien Lang (Hoa Tien or Loves of Annam), Pham Duy Khiem (Legends of Serene Lands, 1943; The Young Woman of Nam Xuong, 1944), Pham Van Ky (The Man from Nowhere, 1946).

During the whole French period, the folklore lode was intensively exploited for its exotic charm, whereas, besides a few masterpieces, classical literature and almost all the contemporary literature was bathed in shadow.

It was not until the August 1945 Revolution that independent Vietnam sought to introduce herself abroad. This was done, among other

things, by the systematic translation of literary works. She was effectively assisted in this task by other socialist countries which edited in their own languages translations of Vietnamese works. Special tribute must be paid to the Soviets whose Vietnamology has already laid solid foundations.

In the framework of this article, we would like to note particularly the effort made in this direction by the Foreign Languages Publishing House (Red River), which for a quarter of a century has translated Vietnamese literary works into French, English, Russian, Chinese, Spanish, Esperanto, etc. The first synthetic attempt was made over a period of 8 years (1970—1977) with the publication in French of an Anthology of Vietnamese Literature<sup>1</sup> with the collaboration of the Vietnam Writers' Association and under the direction of Nguyen Khac Vien and Huu Ngoc. The work consists of a substantial historical introduction and a judicious choice of texts. According to **Le Monde**, "after 115 years of war,.... (this) anthology of Vietnamese literary works comes just in time to help us hear the ancestral voice of this people." **Tel quel** said that "the choice illustrates with a unique strength the profound originality of the culture of Vietnam and the greatness of its people whom nothing could subdue." The **Nouvel Observateur** noted that "published under the bombs, (it was) a delicious and scientific anthology". The British historian Martin Bernal thought that "the Anthology, with a choice of well translated and well-annotated texts constitutes a splendid introduction to a rich world literature". The American journalist Robert Friend was of the opinion that "this work of value has emerged from Vietnam... which is worthy of great attention and a serious study for it fills a disappointing gap in our knowledge of Eastern literature".

Following the favourable reception given to the Anthology of Vietnamese Literature, its authors condensed the four volumes (2,200 pages) into one volume of 1,000 pages<sup>2</sup> which constitutes a practical reference work for all those who are interested in Vietnamese history and culture in general. The English translation has just appeared. "A work compiled with care and intelligence," writes Mireille Gansel, "it is huge and complete in its composition and will allow the reader to become familiar with the richest and the most popular pages of Vietnamese literature".

In the UNESCO collection of representative works, Gallimard (Paris) published in 1981 an Anthology of Vietnamese Poetry composed of excerpts from the above-mentioned Anthology. "The Vietnamese Song: Ten Centuries of Poetry". Such is the subtitle given to the collection, for the author wants to show that here poetry is not dissociated from song with which it mingled at its source.

"The Continuing Song"<sup>3</sup> is a collection of poems written by Vietnamese children, poems written under bombs. "Rain and the sun, the trees and leaves, the buffaloes and flowers: in the eyes of the children, it is the whole invincible Vietnam, a Vietnam turned towards its future," notes Françoise Corréze.

Besides scholarly literature, the Hanoi Publishing House is greatly concerned about the translation of Vietnamese popular literature which reveals the Vietnamese soul, much more than did the writings of the feudal class shaped by the mandarin and Confucianism and those of the emerging bourgeois classes. The first foundations of this work were laid by "Vietnamese Folk Songs" (1958) in which Alice Kahn and Huu Ngoc "tried to convey in the most faithful way possible to the foreign public a small part of a precious cultural treasure... very

little known abroad". More than twenty years later an "Anthology of Popular Vietnamese Literature", more thorough and more complete, was published in Paris with the help of Editions l'Harmattan<sup>4</sup> "A judicious choice of texts and a very good adaptation have made the book a transient but moving portrait of the Vietnamese people as it was and perhaps somewhat as it still is today." (Doan Ket Journal — Paris).

An Anthology of Literature of Ethnic Minorities (53 in Vietnam), which has been in the making for several years, will appear in 1984 or 1985.

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From the historical point of view, Vietnamese literature can be divided into two periods:

1. That of classical literature (from the beginnings to the end of the 19th century) where literary works were written in **Han** (classical Chinese) then, at the same time, in **nom** (demotic script for the transcription of Vietnamese) as from the 15th century.

2. That of modern literature (from the beginning of the 20th century until today) with the exclusive use of the **quoc ngu** (romanized script).

Three of the most representative poets of classical literature: Nguyen Trai, Doan Thi Diem and Nguyen Du have been translated.

In 1980, "Nguyen Trai (1380 — 1442), One of the Finest Figures of Vietnamese History and Literature" was published in French, English, Russian, Spanish and Esperanto<sup>5</sup>, on the occasion of the 600th anniversary of his birth. "The commemoration of the 6th centenary of that poet," stated Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, Director General of UNESCO, "is one of the efforts made by UNESCO to incorporate into the world patrimony the best representatives of every national culture". The articles and documents from Hanoi supplied the review **Europe** (Paris) with material for the publication of a special issue on "Nguyen Trai,

A Vietnamese Classic of the 15th Century".

"The Lament of a Warrior's Wife" (Chinh Phu Ngam — French translation by Le Van Chat, 1963; English translation by Rewi Alley), a poem of the 18th century, is one of the purest jewels of Vietnamese classical literature. It is an anti-war work for human happiness. The Vietnamese translation by Doan Thi Diem outshone the original in **Han** by Dang Tran Con, for her art and sensibility breathed into the poem a new emotion.

"Kieu", a novel of 3,254 lines of verse by Nguyen Du (1765 — 1820), is undisputedly the greatest masterpiece of Vietnamese literature. It is the most popular literary work in Vietnam appreciated by scholars and common people alike. Through the misfortunes and tribulations of a young, beautiful and talented woman, it is a strong indictment against the feudal regime and pays tribute to human values. The French translation by Nguyen Khac Vien is an effort of renewal in the "art of translating" Kieu which had been translated many times previously.

At the turn of the 20th century, Vietnamese literature was modernized, especially with the adoption of the romanized script and various genres from the West: journalism, novel, short story. The eventful period between 1930 and 1945 saw the development of three parallel literary movements namely the romantic movement, the critical realist movement, and the revolutionary movement.

The Foreign Languages Publishing House centers its translations on the last two movements in which the realist novel takes pride of place. "Impasse" by Nguyen Cong Hoan (Translated in French by G. Boudarel, 1963 — and in English) was published in Hanoi in 1938 in the atmosphere of the victory of the Popular Front in France. The rotten apparatus of feudal and colonial exploitation is depicted and dissected in the book by a scathing pen. Nguyen Cong Hoan's cutting mind also strikes fiercely at the mandarins, notables and landlords in the collection of short stories "Canton Chief Ba Lost His Slippers" (Translated in French by

Le Van Chat — and in English). Nam Cao, a wonderful writer who depicted village customs with great irony, wrote outstanding short stories gathered in "Chi Pheo" (Translated in French by Le Van Lap and G. Boudarel — and in English). Nguyen Hong mirrors the life of the poor and miserable people who are driven to theft, crime and debauchery by an inhuman regime, particularly in his "Childhood and Other Short Stories" (French translation by Le Van Chat). "When the Light Is Out" by Ngo Tat To (Translated in French by Le Lien Vu and G. Boudarel; in English by Pham Nhu Oanh) throws a harsh light on feudalism in the countryside, the luxury life of the **nouveaux riches**, the corruption of influential people, the brutality and boorishness of notables and mandarins of all kinds.

Revolutionary poetry affirms its maturity in the works of Ho Chi Minh and To Huu. The "Prison Diary" by Ho Chi Minh (Translated in French by Phan Nhuan, in English by Dang The Binh) has gone round the world. It shows that in that eminent Statesman "intelligence and sensibility are, as one. There is no secret door between the public man and the private man. The same suffering illuminates reason and the heart, the man of action and the poet". To Huu, who was born in 1920, has been fighting for communism since he was 16 years old. Ever since the August 1945 Revolution always abreast of the times, he relates in his poems, the major events of his country. "Blood and Flowers" by Mireille Gansel (E.F.R. Paris, 1975) presents in French the best poems of that militant poet (English and Spanish translations by the Hanoi Foreign Languages Publishing House).

During the First War of Resistance (1945 — 1954) Vietnamese literature went through a period of strong development and produced many works, the most typical of which were translated into several languages when peace was restored. We can cite as examples "The Village That Wouldn't Die", a novel by Nguyen Ngoc about Noup, a hero of the mountain area and the resistance of ethnic groups in

the Central Highlands (Translated in French by Dao Trong Sot and G. Boudarel, in English and Spanish). "The Glowing Embers" by Vo Huy Tam, a writer of the mining area (Translated in French). "The Frontier Campaign" by Nguyen Huy Tuong, on the liberation of the northern frontier area (Cao Bang and Lang Son provinces) in 1950 (Translated in French and English), "Stories of the North West" by To Hoai, stories on the country of the Thais and its mountain landscape, on the ethnic minorities with their colourful customs and their struggle against feudal and colonial oppression (Translated in French and English), "The Last Stronghold" by Huu Mai (Translated in French and English), an episode of Dien Bien Phu.

The war of resistance against US aggression distinguished itself by a true blossoming of poems, novels, tales and short stories, the best of which were conceived in the liberated zones of southern Vietnam. "The Way He Lived" by Tran Dinh Van (Translated in French, English, Russian, Chinese, Spanish, Esperanto and Lao) relates the life and death of the young militant electrician, Nguyen Van Troi. "Hon Dat", a novel by Anh Duc (Translated in French, English, Russian and Chinese) and "A Village Called Faithfulness", a collection of short stories by Nguyen Thi (Translated in French and English) evokes the stubborn and intelligent struggle of our peasants against the Americans' henchmen. In "The Unconquered" (Translated in French), a militant fallen into the enemy's trap tells of his experiences.

Many collections of short stories have won the hearts of foreign readers.

Let us cite, furthermore, the translations of many militants' memoirs and remembrances which, besides their value as historical testimonies, reveal certain literary quality: "Our Heroic People" (in

French, English and Russian), "In the Enemy's Net" (in French and English), "Unforgettable Days" by General Vo Nguyen Giap (in French, English and Spanish).

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In the course of the last twenty-five years the works translated by the Foreign Languages Publishing House (Red River) have allowed foreign readers to have their first contact with Vietnamese literature. There are plenty of shortcomings. Much is to be done to introduce, as the Cuban writer Felix Petos Rodriguez has said, "the rich panorama of a solid and continual literary creation, through which one can see emerge the structure of a national culture, the unshakable solidarity of a people who has come into being and grown up, a people who, throughout the centuries, has shown its depth and strength, and the national conscience which it develops and defends passionately."

HUU NGOC

1. Translation by Huu Ngoc, Ky Anh, Le Van Chat, Nguyen Khac Vien, Pham Huy Thong, Tao Trang, Thu Le, Vu Quy Vy, and Xuan Dieu.

2. Nguyen Khac Vien and Huu Ngoc. Vietnamese Literature, Red River, Hanoi 1979. Translation by Mary Cowan, Carolyn Swetland, Dang The Binh, Elizabeth Hodgkin, and Huu Ngoc.

3. With the collaboration of the *Editeurs Français Reunis*, Paris 1971. Translation by Xuan Dieu, Nguyen Khac Vien, Huu Ngoc — Adaptation by Françoise Corrèze.

4. Huu Ngoc and Françoise Corrèze. Anthology of Vietnamese Popular Literature. Preface by Yves Lacoste — *L'Harmattan*, Paris, 1982.

5. We will not give the names of the translator when the translation is collective.

"The 19m high sand dunes at Sa Huynh<sup>1</sup> lie between the small bay and the sea... Lower to the west is the limpid water of the bay, and farther is the Truong Son Range with its dark mountains. To the east is the fluorescent sea, now beautiful and glowing, now sad and sulky, or angered and menacing. Far below is the sand, composed mostly of grains of quartz which shine under the gentle caress of the sun beams."

I quote the above-mentioned passage written by the French archaeologist M. Colani in her communique on the *Sa Huynh graves* in 1937, thus sparing the effort of further describing the beautiful coast of Nghia Binh province.

It was in the Sa Huynh sand dunes that, at the turn of the century, people came to hear about the traces of ancient graves. At first, some Frenchmen, who knew nothing about archaeology, started digging up the area. In 1924, a French architect named H. Parmentier described the artefacts collected during those non-scientific excavations in his report on the Sa Huynh jars. Ten years later, in 1934, M. Colani carried out excavations of the Sa Huynh area. In 1939, the Swedish archaeologist Olof Janse continued the work of his predecessor. However, regrettably, no results of these excavations have so far been made public.

The Sa Huynh monument is generally called the "site of jars" or the grave area of jars, for hundreds of jars were found in the sand. They are on an average 0.80 m high and 0.50 m in diameter. In the jars there are many pieces of pottery, such as dishes, highlegged bowls, jugs in the shape of flower-baskets and flare-edged pots. Ancient Man used clam shells to decorate the surface of these objects before baking them. Some pieces of pottery have vermilion-red or lead-dark stripes. In the jars there are also many beautiful jewels such as earrings, rivieres of jade, agate or crystal. The most original earrings are those with three hooks. Besides the pieces of pottery and jewels, there are tools and weapons such as picks, hoes, sickles and spearheads. In a number of jars there are traces of



# NEW ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDIES ON THE SA HUYNH CULTURE

bones, that is why these are considered coffins. Some people say that these ashes are cremated ones, while others say they are exhumed ashes.

It is obvious that the graves of jars on the Sa Huynh beach tell us a lot about the high level of culture attained by a group of ancient inhabitants on our land. But in what epoch did they live? Where did they come from? Whither did they go? It is really difficult to give adequate answers to these questions if we base ourselves solely on the isolated traces found along the Nghia Binh coast. Przulski holds that the Sa Huynh culture is a maritime culture, while Colani tried to find out the influence of the East European Hallstatt culture on the Sa Huynh relics. So, despite the scarcity of documents, French scholars wanted to trace the origin of the Sa Huynh relics in foreign countries.

Not until the '60s did we get more information about the Sa Huynh Culture. French geologists such as E. Saurin and H. Fontaine, who were working in Saigon at the time, discovered a number of graves around Xuan Loc, in the present-day Dong Nai province. These graves of jars present the same characteristics as those of Sa Huynh, Nghia Binh province. Since then archaeologists have spoken

about a *Sa Huynh Culture*, widely distributed from southern Central Vietnam to the Dong Nai river basin.

However, the French geologists still did not carry out really scientific and systematic excavations. It is said that on Sunday mornings, H. Fontaine would wait until there was a rather heavy traffic on the road to Bien Hoa to dare go out of Saigon, for fear of Viet Cong attacks. He would hurry to the graves of jars, hastily dig up one or two jars and return home, and would wait until the following Sunday to carry out his rapid archaeological excavations.

After the country was reunified our archaeologists stepped up their research on the Sa Huynh Culture. Sustained efforts in surveys and excavations over the last few years have resulted in a better knowledge of the Sa Huynh Culture.

Archaeologists have resumed excavations of monuments of the Sa Huynh Culture in Nghia Binh province and are trying to find traces of this culture to the North as well as to the South.

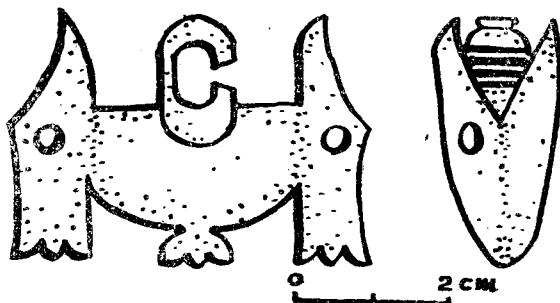
To the south, relics of the Sa Huynh Culture have been discovered successively in Phu Khanh province (for example the Con hamlet at Cam Ranh), and Thuan Hai province (for example Hon

Do at Ninh Hai and Bau Hoe at Ham Duc). In the Dong Nai river basin, archaeologists have discovered and excavated a new grave of jars at Suoi Chon, Xuan Loc district, Dong Nai province. In the jars there are crystal or nephrite three-hooked earrings, iron axes, sickles and swords, just like in Sa Huynh.

To the north, for the first time our archaeologists have discovered the relics of the Sa Huynh Culture in Quang Nam—Da Nang province. The Tam My graves, at Tam Ky district, have been excavated and 24 jars unearthed. Here, besides articles in iron, bronze bells and spearheads have been discovered. Especially besides large rivieres of agate, jade and numerous strings of red and blue glass beads, there are earrings made of stone and adorned with the two heads of a kind of long-eared animal. That is an extremely original ornament generally referred to by archaeologists as *two-animal-head earrings*, which were previously found only in the graves of jars of Dong Nai province.

Also at Tam Ky district, archaeologists have excavated the Bau Tram site, 10km from the district seat. Here, besides the graves of jars, for the first time we have been able to learn about the place of residence of the Sa Huynh Culture. In the domicile many pieces of pottery, of bronze and even of crystal have been found. In a number of jars at Phu Hoa, Tam Ky district, archaeologists have come across a set of articles in bronze including daggers, spearheads, axes and chisels. These bronze objects are very similar to the bronze objects belonging to the Dong Son Culture and have never been found previously in the monuments of the Sa Huynh Culture.

In Quang Nam—Da Nang province graves of jars have also been found in the Ngu Hanh Son area as well as in the Dien Ban, Tien Phuoc districts, and in mountain areas such as Que Loc (Que Son district) and Dai Lanh (Dai Loc district). The Dai Lanh grave area at Dai Loc is very large and rich. Hundreds of jars arranged like pawns on a chessboard are scattered on various hills. The jars are full of pieces of pottery, iron and countless ornaments in red



Earring with two hooks.

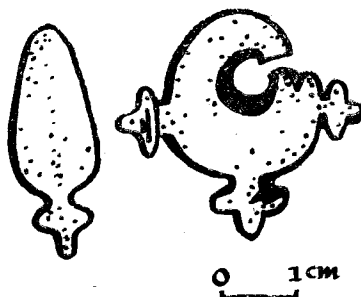
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agate or blue nephrite. Archaeologists have found here scores of two-animal-head earrings, whereas in other grave areas there are only one or two.

With the discovery of these grave sites in mountain areas such as Que Loc and Dai Lanh, we cannot consider the Sa Huynh Culture as a maritime culture, as was thought in the past.

The Sa Huynh Culture was distributed over a large area extending from the mountain to the sea, from Quang Nam—Da Nang to Dong Nai. The dates identified by the C14 radiated carbon method show that the Sa Huynh Culture started at the beginning of the Iron Age dating back 2,500 years ago and lasting until the later half of the first millenium B.C. So the Sa Huynh Culture existed in the southern part of our country in the same period as the Dong Son Culture in the northern part. Binh Tri Thien province is the buffer zone between the Dong Son and Sa Huynh Cultures. Here the interaction of the influence of these two cultures has been found. Through Binh Tri Thien the two-animal-head earrings of the Sa Huynh Culture went to the Xuan An monument, a monument of the Dong Son Culture on the banks of the Lam river, Nghe Tinh province. Also through Binh Tri Thien the Dong Son Culture daggers and spearheads went to Tam Ky, Quang Nam—Da Nang province. Archaeologists are paying special attention to the interrelationship between these two great cultures. The origin of the Dong Son Culture has been brought to light thanks to the discovery of the Pre-Dongsonian cultures. Our archaeologists are making every effort to find the origin of the Sa Huynh Culture and recent excavations have brought new materials to light.

In a sand dune at Binh Chau, near the Ba Lang An cape, at Binh Son district, Nghia Binh province, archaeologists have discovered a place of residence and graves of ancient people. The pieces of pottery found here differ somewhat from those found at Sa Huynh but some have the colour of vermilion and of lead like those at Sa Huynh. We note the absence of iron articles, but a great num-



Earring with three hooks.

ber of bronze articles. A number of archaeologists hold that Binh Chau dates back to the Bronze Age, to a period earlier than the Sa Huynh Culture, but which has close relationship with Sa Huynh.

The excavation of the Long Thanh area at Duc Pho district, Nghia Binh province, has important consequences for finding the origin of the Sa Huynh Culture. In the sand dune on the beach of Long Thanh archaeologists have discovered the domicile and graves of ancient people. In the jars, there are vases of pottery of beautiful forms and original designs, never found in the relics of the Sa Huynh Culture, but the way of burying the jars in the graves is similar to that of the Sa Huynh Culture. Particularly in the jars at Long Thanh, there are no bronze and iron objects, but only pieces of pottery, stone ornaments and axes and picks. The date of the Long Thanh site has been identified by the C14 method, namely  $1420 \pm 40$  B.C. and  $925 \pm 60$  B.C. This means that the Long Thanh site is much earlier than the



A ceramic jar found at Long Thanh.

already known relics of the Sa Huynh Culture. We can consider Long Thanh and Binh Chau as pre-Sa Huynh relics, as different landmarks in the development towards the Sa Huynh Culture. At present archaeologists have discovered pieces of lead-coloured pottery belonging to the Bau Tro Culture, a Neolithic Age Culture, in Binh Tri Thien province. Therefore, there is increasing evidence for us to affirm that the Sa Huynh Culture has a profound and age-old origin, and rose from other cultures which existed before it in our country. No doubt, the Sa Huynh Culture is a local culture, which originated in Vietnam, and does not come from a foreign culture as many Western scholars have presumed.

Like the Dong Son Culture in the North, the Sa Huynh Culture knew a bright development and exerted its influence on other areas of Southeast Asia. On Palawan island, (the Philippines) and in U Thong province (Thailand) archaeologists have discovered two-animal-head earrings and three-hooked earrings. Even Thai and Filipino archaeologists admit that these ornaments and jewels are articles belonging to the Sa Huynh Culture in Vietnam. Of course, the Sa Huynh Culture has in its turn been influenced by Southeast Asian cultures.

Vietnamese archaeologists gathered at the Vietnam Museum of History on 24 December 1981 to hold discussions on the Sa Huynh Culture. Many questions are still open, namely the landmarks on the way of development to the Sa Huynh Culture, the local forms of the Sa Huynh Culture, which tribe was the owner of the Sa Huynh Culture, etc. But consensus was reached on this point: the Sa Huynh Culture was a high-level culture of local origin and held a very important position in the Prehistory and Early History of Vietnam as well as of Southeast Asia.

HA VAN TAN

1. A locality situated on the coast of former Quang Ngai province, now Nghia Binh province.

# THE KAMPUCHEAN MIRACLE,

*if there is such a thing...*

*Françoise Corrèze*

Lecturer at the Faculty of Arts in Phnom Penh from 1965 to 1970, Françoise Corrèze returned there in December 1979. In April 1980, she wrote a book entitled *Choses vues au Cambodge* published by the Editeurs Français Réunis in Paris.

She went back there three years in a row. Now after her fourth visit she tells us of her impressions.

What I feel after my fourth visit to Cambodia cannot be separated from the sentiments I keep in my heart for this people whom I have known for years.

Each time I come to Phnom Penh a kaleidoscope of impressions crowds my mind.

Images of the past in which life drifted easily by chiefly for privileged citizens possessing money and power, in a country which had no real unity.

Images of anguish in 1979—1980 with charnel houses, destroyed schools, demolished hospitals, empty homes, children wide-eyed from hunger... Remembrance of tortured friends who died in torment such as Sien An, ambassador of the Cambodian Liberation Front in Hanoi.

And yet, beyond this horror, a nascent hope: schools which open, albeit without tables; without paper, without books, but overflowing; hospitals where the patients are tended without beds, without medicines and almost without doctors; life which triumphs thanks to the determination of those Cambodians who escaped death with the help of the Vietnamese and the Soviet Union, and the assistance of international organisations.

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In 1981—1982 it was called a miracle. I don't like this expression which always implies something unconditional.

In Cambodia, more than anywhere else, it is people's will and the spirit of solidarity that have created it.

This miracle is not found in the streets, where the houses are still subject to the wake of the past.

This miracle, if there is such a thing, is in the eyes of the children whose laughter and curiosity have superseded hunger. And it exists in the coloured sarongs of women, in their relaxed air and their recovered gracefulness.

It is found in new-born babies, in the death-rate which from 18% in 1979, fell to 4% in 1981, in the markets swarming with people, in fishing, one of the main resources of the country, which is being re-organized; in that Russei Keo textile mill, where the clatter of 230 looms instead of last year's 160 can be heard, operated mainly by women.

It is also found in the 1,003,000 school children and 21,000 teachers.

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I returned once again to Phnom Penh in February 1983.

What dazzled us in the past years now appears to be normal. An understandable familiarity.

The horror revolted us. So the revival made us cry "miracle".

And now the emergency period is over.

I went up and down the avenues where Japanese and Soviet-made motor cars cross packed pedicabs, nickel bikes, and motorbikes carrying sometimes five or six passengers.

Everybody eats on the pavement or in the restaurants where prices are going up.

All the houses are occupied but not so well kept. The markets are more and more stocked with vegetables, fruit, fish and sundry products which arrive legally or otherwise.

The government finds it difficult to prevent the sale of medicines coming in bulk nobody knows from where and sold at exorbitant prices, the use of which is most dangerous without a doctor's advice.

It is difficult to set up the foundations of a new society in a country whose infrastructure has been destroyed, and where technicians and materials are lacking.

I still hear Lida Sisowath, Sihanouk's cousin, telling me as she

pointed at destroyed houses: "We have no cement. Who will blueprint the plans of restoration? Where are the technicians who will execute them?"

And she punctuated her sentence with her still merry laughter which seemed to overcome past sufferings.

However, at the handicraft village of Pre Lun, among the mango, bread fruit and papaw trees, silk weaving looms clatter under the roof of houses repaired by the collective, while the children go to school, holding under their arms slates donated by UNICEF.

This year I could not go to O Russei, a Cham village in the forest 70 km from Phnom Penh, where I had done three years of ethnological research, but I know that if tradition survives the massacre of over three-fifths of its population, a second rice crop will soon be harvested which will make it possible for the inhabitants to improve their living conditions.

I attended an international forum for peace in Southeast Asia — sign of a new policy. The Chams wearing skull-caps took part in the congress alongside the Khmers. A message of peace. This congress will perhaps attract the attention of those who support the representatives of a genocidal government at the UN.

During my stay I had the pleasure of meeting friends again:

Pen Navouth in his ministerial office.

It is moving for me to find after fifteen years a student of the Phnom Penh Faculty of Arts, to find him alive..., to find him minister of national education in his shattered country.

He told me: "Our concern is to form cadres for a new life based on peace, justice, love of work. As most of the former cadres were killed, at the outset we received the assistance of the Vietnamese. Now, except for a few disciplines, we can fend for ourselves."

Education is entirely secularized. Everywhere schools mushroom with the help of pupils' parents, bonzes and friends.

One million six hundred thousand pupils are expected for the end of 1983.

Pen Navouth has the same look as before: serious but smiling.

I also saw Khieu Kanharith who is still active and bubbling with ideas; doctors Nouth Savoeun, My Samedi and Ang Sarun are as always devoted to their task; Vandy Kaonn whose eyes burn with hope even during a crisis of impatience, which is often justified.

I still remember his remarks regarding the security of his country, and the indispensable assistance afforded by the Vietnamese.

Vandy Kaonn speaks of the Vietnamese with a correctness which is touching. No flattery but with real dignity and gratitude.

Vandy Kaonn speaks as a Cambodian, conscious of differences, but also conscious of a solidarity the importance of which is vital for the two peoples.

To answer him, I can only repeat what Nguyen Khac Vien wrote a few months ago:

"To the people who built Angkor — this unique upsurge of stone and abundance of architecture and sculpture — we owe admiration and gratitude. To this people who suffered as never before, we all owe a debt of active solidarity."

Hai had reached the gate of his house, yet he still felt perplexed and hesitated about entering.

Back home! As a matter of fact, he, a "dust of life" youth, should have served more time before being allowed home. For he was being held under surveillance at a Reform School for young delinquents. The reason for his detention: caught redhanded stealing a bicycle.

Hai's return home today came as a surprise to his family. He had fled from the re-education school.

Both his mother and younger sister were at the same time anxious and pleased when he suddenly appeared on the doorstep. He was ragged and dirty. With his rather tall stature, his face covered by a frown and a dirty stubble, shoulder-length hair, he looked a bit like a bandit chief — one who had gone broke.

Tugging at his sleeve, his mother sobbed.

"Where have you been all this past year?" she asked. "We thought you'd dropped dead somewhere by the roadside or in a bush."

Hai sighed. The sight of his folks crying had never been to his liking. Glancing at his 20-year-old younger sister, he noticed that she had grown into a fairly pretty girl. He slumped into a chair, smoothed his face with his hand to retrieve his calmness, then cleverly told his mother:

"I've been doing some trade in a far-off place... I had bad luck, and lost all the money I'd made... Now..."

"Now, you can return here and live with me," she said, interrupting him. "We'll live together, saving every cent... Then you'll get a job. All your friends in this ward are working..."

Wiping her tears, the old woman turned round to look at her daughter, her face brightening up. The girl timidly looked at her brother, then said joyfully:

"I'm a school-teacher now, you know."

"Where are you teaching?" Hai asked perfunctorily. "Is it far from home?"

"A bit far, but I've got a bike, and it takes me only about twenty minutes to get there."

Had nodded his head. He felt that things had been going well at home. In the old, narrow apartment which resounded with rain drops on the corrugated iron roof, the atmosphere seemed cosy. Three or four shirts and an equal number of pairs of trousers, all newly

# THE BICYCLE

washed, hung in the kitchen. The old sewing machine still stood at a corner of the room, covered with a piece of fabric, a pair of scissors and bobbins of thread lying scattered everywhere.

Hai's father had died when he was still a little boy. Ever since, his mother had been sewing things for people in the neighbourhood. Leaning against the wooden wall was a still new, well-cleaned Cuu Long bicycle. So, he thought, things were going well at home. Both his mother and younger sister were making a decent living, having enough for food and clothes... He alone...

He felt hungry.

"Have you got any food left?" he asked, grumbling.

"Good heavens!" His mother exclaimed. She hurried into the kitchen, and busied herself with bowls and dishes for a moment.

...Minutes later, Hai found himself sitting before a dish full of cold rice, on which rested a few pieces of stewed soybean. He made short work of all this. While raking all the remaining grains of cooked rice into his mouth, he reminisced about his former "golden days." At that time he was still a professional bike-thief who had never been caught in the act... Every night, he ate and drank his fill in restaurants and cafés... What with fried noodles, pork or stewed duck, beef dipped in vinegar... Paradoxically enough, however, never in those days had he eaten with such good appetite as he did today, almost dying of hunger.

"You haven't eaten enough, have you?" His younger sister asked in a friendly tone.

Hai was at a loss to answer.

"I'll go and buy you some bread and liver pâté," she said. "Just wait a little moment..."

Hai objected weakly. The girl numbly got up and took out her bicycle.

The old woman looked out into the sky. The rain had stopped, yet it was still dark outside.

"Be careful, darling," she said anxiously. "It's nighttime, and the traffic is still heavy."

The girl smiled gracefully. "I'm no longer a child..." she said. "I'll go to Ham Nghi Street, to the old market-place, you know. Just a few minutes' ride."

Hai lightly shuddered. Knitting his brows, he suggested: "You can buy it somewhere near here, can't you?"

The girl kept pushing her bicycle out and said:

"Bread and liver pâté at Ham Nghi Street are among the best in the city, brother. I... I know where to get the best stuff."

Hai looked at her sister until she had got out of sight. The blue paint of her bicycle was still fresh in his mind's eye. That image had stung him to the quick. The name of "Ham Nghi Street", like a needle thrust into his hand, seemed to arouse memories of his past. That crowded business street was his former "theatre of operation". And the days he hung around there were both his heyday and unforgettable day of humiliation...

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Hai had never learned a trade. After failing his high school graduation examinations, he had served in the Saigon army for three years during which he learned nothing useful. Instead, he had acquired some new, bad habit: drinking wine, kicking up rows which usually ended in fisticuffs, opium-smoking, cursing and swearing, and visiting brothels whenever he got some money—such were the things he had learned during his time as a soldier.

To tell the truth, he had learned a new "trade" just by chance. One day, after getting drunk during a heavy meal at a first-rate restaurant, he was arrested by the Military Police and put in jail. The MP put one of his hands in a pair of 8-shaped American made handcuffs made of very hard steel. His days in jail were rendered even more uncomfortable as the damned MP had

put his hand in one ring and the hand of another detained soldier in the other ring. The two soldiers were so "closely bound" together that whenever one of them stood up, the other had to stand up, too. Most funny of all, whenever Hai wanted to pee, his mate had to follow him. How could they sleep in such a posture throughout the night!

Curiously enough, Hai's prison mate kept smiling. He mischievously glanced at the door, and waited until the guard had left after carefully locking it from the outside. Only then did he use his free hand to fish out from under his sleeve a piece of steel wire which he had filed into a thin blade. To Hai's surprise, he thrust the steel wire into the key-hole of the handcuffs, and with some moves loosened the handcuffs to such a degree that both of them could pull out their cramped hands.

Wonderful! Hai called the other guy "Master" and spent all that night learning how to use the steel wire. The other soldier did not only pass on his experience to Hai, but also gave him the steel wire as a souvenir. He said that he could use any steel wire, after filing it, to open any lock. "Except"—he added, smiling in a literary style—"except the one that opens to you the door into a sky of freedom and happiness!"

One day, Hai's prison mate climbed over the wall in an attempt to escape but was shot dead by the guards. Hai was transferred to a barracks where he worked as a courier for the rear command of his regiment. He whiled time away in the barracks by drinking, and amused himself by training his hands at opening locks. For this purpose he collected all the old cast-off locks in the barracks. With a steel wire flattened at one end, he managed to open dozens of locks of all types. Later, to open the most sophisticated lock labelled "Yale", he had to use a little pair of very thin steel pincers. Hai's hands manipulated the pincers so dexterously that they looked like those of an experienced surgeon.

One day, he gave the final demonstration of his talent at the barracks by opening an iron coffer at the regiment's command post, and stealing a pile of printed forms for permits to go on leave. He took a red stamp and stamped all the forms. Then he picked out the cleanest form and filled in his name, giving himself permission to spend a 15-day annual leave in Saigon, and, without the least hesitation, signed the name of his regiment commander. Thus provided with a fully legal permit and several other reserve papers which he stuck into an inner breast-pocket of his well pressed

uniform, he got into a bus which whisked him from Hue to Saigon without a hitch.

He wandered in the Saigon streets for several days. One day, while he was craving for a cup of coffee and some cigarettes, he came across Bay Map (Big Bay) in Ham Nghi Street. Hai recognized Big Bay without difficulty, as the latter had also been drafted into the Thieu army in Central Vietnam. Big Bay, however, was the first to recognize Hai. It turned out that both of them had served in the same regiment. Hai worked at the CP office while Big Bay served in an "operational" batta-

lion. This was why Big Bay had deserted earlier than Hai had.

Big Bay now looked quite different from Hai. He had grown even fatter and bigger than when he was first nicknamed "Big Bay". He was well dressed, and even looked like a lady's man. His face was round and fleshy. Sitting like a fat pig on a Honda motorbike whose engine purred smoothly, he really looked like a thriving man.

Big Bay showed himself to be generous. As soon as he saw his former "comrade-in-arms", he dragged him into a *pho* shop and treated him to a big bowl of "special" soup with slices of beef, a glass of iced coffee and Lucky cigarettes.

Waiting until Hai had eaten his fill, Big Bay spoke in a brotherly voice.

"I make no bones about telling you that I'm the King of bike-thieves in this quarter. You're looking 'hard up' at the moment. If you wish to follow me, it'll be okay. After each catch, I'll share enough cash for a few dozen cups of coffee and other things. That's something to begin with. Then, we'll proceed to a higher level. Okay?"

"Okay," Hai answered with a shrug, not having time to think the matter over.

... Their first venture proved a success. That day an old man had entered a shop to buy some roast pork leaving his carefully locked bicycle outside. In a jiffy, Big Bay unlocked the bike, leapt upon the saddle, wove his way into the crowd then veered into another street. Hai rode Big Bay's Honda, caught up with him then put on top speed with Big Bay's hand on his shoulder... Big Bay sold the bike for a few hundred *dong* at an open-air market at the Nga Sau crossroads and gave Hai 50 *dong*.

The second "catch" came with a young man's bike whose rear wheel was fixed by a chain with a big, queer-looking lock. Big Bay spent a long moment trying to open the lock, and his shirt was soaked through with sweat, yet his efforts proved futile. He looked around, thinking of giving up. Hai rested the still running Honda on its prop and strode towards the locked bicycle.

"You ride the Honda away, quick!" He urged.

That was what Big Bay had been waiting for. Hai bent down and with a quick move, thrust his pincers into the lock, and opened it as easily as if it were his own bike, then rode it away.



V. HUYEN 83

Illustration by VU HUYEN

This time Big Bay had to give Hai half the proceeds from the bicycle: 200 dong. Handing him the money, Big Bay said, breathing hard: "Good heavens! I was so scared that I thought I'd have to call it quits. What a damned lock!"

He looked at Hai with admiration.

"So, you've become a master at it, haven't you? ... Well, from now on, let the two of us do business in this area, and we'll take an equal share of whatever we get. I'll handle the easier jobs, and you'll make a show of your talent at cracking the harder nuts."

From that day, Hai began leading a "regal" life, becoming one of the "best customers" of luxurious restaurants at the old market and Ham Nghi Street, which had long been reputed for its row of shops selling the best roast pork, chicken and duck, liver pâté, sausages and golden bread in Saigon.

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By April 30, 1975 (the day of complete liberation of South Vietnam—Tr.), the number of bicycles stolen by Big Bay and Hai could no longer be counted on the fingers of both hands. From that day Hai felt at ease, as he no longer had to worry about being arrested by the Military Police for desertion. And he went ever deeper into his new "trade" of stealing bicycles. One day, no sooner had he leapt upon a stolen bike than people cried out:

"Stop thief! Stop thief!"

The shouts made him shiver with fear.

He pushed away the stolen bike, and turned round to look for Big Bay. But the latter had fled into another street on his Honda. A young man clad in a worker's blue overall leapt forward from nowhere, and locked his arms around Hai's waist. He squirmed furiously, trying to hit and kick the young man, but to no avail. He was scared and feeling sore and stupefied. He knew that this worker was not the owner of the bicycle, but only a passer-by... Then two policemen came and arrested him. They lightly pushed him forward towards the ward's police station. He glanced at them then bent his head. People surrounded him shouting, and cursed him, a woman vendor rushed forward, intending to bring her bam-

boo shoulder pole down on his head, but one of the policemen promptly stopped her.

That night, lying in the custody room of the ward's police station, Hai felt more bewildered and afraid than ever before. This time he would have to appear before a people's court and would surely get a term of imprisonment, he thought. He knew something about imprisonment under the former regime, but he had no idea yet about what it would be like under the new system... He thought he would have to present to the authorities a case history of himself in which he would have to disclose that he had once served in the puppet army, in addition to being a "dust of life", an idler, and guilty of stealing many bicycles... Well, this was the beginning of his end, he thought...

At that time, the "Responsibility and Love" Campaign was in full swing throughout the city. Young people, victims of former social evils—street toughs, drug-addicts, "dust of life", prostitutes, pick-pockets, etc., were being gathered together and sent to centres for re-education through labour. Those guilty of more serious crimes—murder or robbery, gangsters, professional bandits and the like—were not included in these categories, but had to appear before a people's court for public trials. Hai had learned of these things recently through loudspeakers installed at each street quarter, which daily reported the above-mentioned campaign.

In the morning, at the questions put to him by the police officer sitting on the other side of a desk and looking at him with stern eyes, Hai muttered:

"This is... the first time... I've done such a..."

Before the officer had time to ask another question, noises came from the front-yard of the police station. Somebody said that a bus had come to take to a re-education camps young delinquents who were being detained at the station.

"After all, re-education is more bearable than... imprisonment," Hai thought. But he shuddered when the police officer stood up, waved his hand, and said:

"Well, this is the first time you steal a bike. So we'll send you somewhere for re-education. You'll go to a school run by the City organisation of the Youth Union. They're waiting for you."

Everybody at the police station looked busy and in a hurry, and

nobody asked him any further question.

He got into a heavy-duty lorry, which was already crammed with young people whom he immediately recognised as his "colleagues": youngmen with dishevelled shoulder-length hair, pale and haggard faces like those of drug-addicts craving for an LSD "trip", then thin arms covered with all kinds of tattoos.

The truck started off, then gathered speed, leaving the city far behind.

The sun had set. Amidst the semi-darkness of the foliage of a forest, Hai saw a tall porch bearing a horizontal wooden board inscribed with screaming letters: Youth School For Building A New Life.

The "new recruits" were guided into the camp just at nightfall. The haggard "dust of life", men and women, followed a few young men wearing the Shock Youth uniform. Looking around, Hai noticed a very strange thing. The whole place was a barracks, with attractive outhouses lying near one another, and it looked like a small village, not in the least like a re-education camp.

The barracks nestled amidst the forest itself, and nowhere did Hai see the barbed wire entanglements so familiar to him during his previous detentions under the former regime. Neither did he see guards armed to the teeth, with rubber truncheons snapping by their sides. He only saw a handful of Shock Youth members nimbly going to and fro. He later learned that they were directly in charge of the school. The "new recruits", Hai included, were taken to a sizable thatch-roofed shack. In the front-yard, sets of tables and chairs made of logs were set in good order. Some electric lights shone from high poles, and the rumble of a generator was heard from some distance.

Breaking the silence, the Shock Youth man who had been guiding the newcomers cleared his throat and spoke loud and clear:

"The Xuyen Moc Youth School For Building A New Life warmly welcomes you. Dear friends, right from this moment, you are the new students of this school. Tomorrow morning, we shall work in detail with you and brief you about the school's regulations on life and study here. Now, the night has come (he smiled), and surely you must feel... hungry. Right? So, please get prepared for dinner

right here. Then you'll go to the dormitory. Each of you will have a separate bed, and we'll bring you each a mosquito net and a blanket. And before going to bed, don't forget to hang up the mosquito net. There's a host of mosquitoes here, you know. That's all."

The "new recruits" found themselves clapping their hands.

The two Shock Youth men consulted each other for a short moment. Then one of them spoke aloud, directing his voice into the thatch-roofed shack:

"We propose that tonight Company One move into the shacks of Companies Two and Three to make room for the 'new recruits'."

The whole place was astir. From the shack, the old-timers walked out in file, each carrying a blanket and a mat. They looked at their new friends with curious eyes.

"That's it," Hai thought. "So I've ended up by coming here. But life here doesn't seem too bad. No warning blows or kicks like those dealt by jailers under the former regime. That was what I feared most. Not so much because I feared pain—infighting was common among soldiers in the former days—as because of the indescribable humiliation of having to stand still and receive blows and insults from others without having the least possibility to resist."

After eating his fill, Hai immediately went to bed. And—how strange and natural at the same time—it was the soundest sleep he ever had, he who had been living outside the bounds of the law. He no longer worried about being hunted, arrested and detained. For the first time in his life, he was living in a community.

...The next morning, the new students were about to go for a haircut and to get their uniforms when a Shock Youth man from the school's command rushed in.

Hai overheard him telling the man in charge of the new students:

"Orders from the directorate: guide the 'new recruits' to the flag-pole yard to attend the graduation ceremony to be held for the hundred students of the present class."

Hai looked at the group of 100 new graduates. Some of the faces looked familiar to him. Under the bright green uniforms the sun-tanned bodies looked wiry and youthful, although some traces betrayed a troubled, bitter past. Some tattoos could still be seen

under rolled-up sleeves, early wrinkles appeared on some faces... And to think that barely one year had gone by... Hai thought that one year earlier, he could have easily come across these people anywhere on the Saigon pavements. But in another form: they were then street toughs, "dust of life", open-air marketeers, burglars and pick-pockets, drug-addicts, prostitutes and pimps... Yet, today, they had changed beyond recognition, almost metamorphosed.

Knitting his brows, Hai attentively reviewed the faces among the new graduates. There went Tony Quy, who had been caught snatching a wrist-watch from a passer-by, Bobby Long, a professional knifer... There was also... Robert Ach, a heavy drug-addict and cheating gambler... And, incredibly, there were Mary Lieu and Annie Tuyet, two sexy beer-selling girls at Saigon harbour... He recognised them all, unmistakably. Yet now, they all looked serious and dignified in their Shock Youth uniforms, and Hai felt great... respect for them.

...The ceremony closed. The hundred new Shock Youth members talked excitedly with one another. Students who had come there earlier eagerly went to work sites as if they had got used to the routine. Carrying hoes, spades, and other implements, they marched into immense fields which resounded with a melodious chorus.

Only the "new recruits" were the most leisured. They took turns in entering the camp office for procedural matters. They had their names registered, and went to the infirmary for an examination. Then each of them had a haircut, and was issued a pair of uniforms... While waiting for a haircut, Hai sat leaning his back against a tree, his eyes half closed. Although he did not put his hand on his forehead, yet he was thinking a lot. He found that the new system was really strange. It helped the riffraff of the former society to rebuild their lives. A former drug-addict, who had been drifting about half dead, half alive, who had thought his life was wasted, has now been cured, and is living and working like other people. A former gangster who deserved to be hanged, has now been reformed into an honest man. And even a former young prostitute, who had wandered in the streets in tattered clothes, waiting for death in hunger, cold and disease, has been cured, and has become clean

both inside and outside. All those things Hai could not at all deny, having seen them with his own eyes. He himself, if he so wished, could still have time to strive to become an honest man, a citizen equal to any other citizen, and nobody had a right to recall his past and speak ill of him.

At the same time, however, Hai felt both his mouth and his stomach were running dry. Things looked difficult at the start. He parted and closed his lips. He was craving for a cigarette, a cup of coffee, a glass of liquor, brightly coloured game cards... and so many other things. How could he find all that here? He saw the silhouettes of people swinging hoes over the ground in the scorching sun, their backs soaked with sweat. He felt disheartened. He seemed to hear the sounds of stereo music in restaurants and cafés in the dim yellow lights of Saigon, where he sat with his legs stretched out, sipping coffee and puffing at strong cigarettes. His eyes were dazzled as if he had seen the bustling night falling on Saigon. Saigon, the city with its irresistible charm... Saigon... He missed it to the point of going mad...

And back to Saigon he fled right that day.

\*  
\* \*

Hai fell asleep in the midst of his recollections. He had just gone through a lease of life with so many "ups and downs", a life which was unfolding in his mind like a long feature film. When would the film end, he wondered.

...And so Hai dozed off for a moment in the old apartment where he had not returned for a long time. His mother's cough awoke him. He wondered why his sister had not returned yet. He felt bewildered and uneasy for unknown reasons. Maybe he knew what had happened to her, but dared not figure it out.

The gate of his house suddenly shook as if someone had flung it wide open.

"Mum... mum!" His younger sister cried out.

Without turning his head, Hai knew what had happened.

The girl broke in, her hair ruffled. Clasp her mother, she wept bitterly.

"Oh! Mum, I had my bike stolen!"



"Now then, darling," the old woman groaned, bewildered.

Although Hai had guessed part of the story right after his sister had rushed back home, he shivered with cold. He felt his heart aching the more he heard his mother and sister weep.

With a lump in her throat, the girl moaned:

"I had... locked my bike, and left it near the bakery. It was dark... After paying the baker and getting the bread, I went back to where I had put my bike... but it was no longer there. I remembered that somebody riding a bicycle had just disappeared into a street running through the old market... I cried out... but it was too late."

"What bad luck for you!..." Filled with anger, the old woman groaned again. "The bike cost you five or six hundred *dong*. How can you make that much money to buy a new one?... And then by what means will you go to work at such a far-off place?... Heavens! What a wretched thief!"

Hai started as if he himself had just been cursed. Only now did he dare to turn round to look at his sister. The loaf of bread and the liver pâté she had bought for him lay on the table nearby. Oh, the wretched loaf of bread, his own wretched hunger, his own wretched presence tonight had brought disaster to this house... And above all, the wretched bike-thieves!... Big Bay, himself... all of them wretched scoundrels...

He covered his face with his hands, then dug them into his hair, feeling like tearing it off. Not long ago he himself had stolen dozens of bicycles, without knowing who his victims were. Never, never before had he seen them stagger home, relating the unhappy story to their bewildered families. Now, he saw with his own eyes such a victim. He felt a sharp pain in his heart, as if he himself had stolen his sister's bicycle.

He sprang to his feet, and looked at his sister. He wanted to say a few words to console her. He wanted to say very nice words to her, yet in the end he could not help speaking curtly.

"Where was your bike stolen?" he asked.

The girl wiped away her tears and said: "In front of the bakery, at the old market-place, Ham Nghi Street."

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\* \*

Not until nine o'clock the next morning did Hai find Big Bay.

The latter was sitting in a restaurant at a crowded street fork where so many excellent breakfast things in the old market-place were sold.

Big Bay was at first surprised to see Hai, but soon anxiety flashed across his eyes. Nonetheless he pretended to be pleased at the encounter.

"So glad to see you again. Well..." He said in a lower voice, filled with admiration: "Well... You've just been there for two days, and here you are now. You're really... Number One!"

Hai silently took a seat, and cast a glance at the table. The different kinds of bowls and dishes which littered it spoke enough about the menu of Big Bay's breakfast. The latter, Hai guessed, had just feasted himself with a big bowl of noodle soup with pork leg, two soft-boiled eggs, a loaf of sweet bread and a big glass of milk.

Big Bay invited Hai to order his breakfast, and eagerly handed him a package of filter cigarettes. Hai shook his head, although he was craving for them. Today he felt something abhorrent in all that abundance.

"Have you done good business these last days?" he asked coolly.

"Nope," Big Bay said, shrugging his shoulders. Then his face brightened up... "Ah", he said, "last night I had a good catch. This was a rare piece of good luck, for these days people have got so careful, and it is not easy to 'snatch' a bike."

"Last night?..." Hai asked, keeping calm.

"Yes, last night..." Big Bay gloated. "It belonged to a girl who was buying bread at the old market in Ham Nghi Street..."

"Was it a good bike?"

"Quite. Almost brand new. It had a beautiful green coat of paint. It bore the Cuu Long trade mark, the genuine type, 100 per cent genuine."

So the culprit was none other than Big Bay himself, Hai thought. Clenching his teeth, he asked:

"Where did you put the bike?"

"Where? What a strange question! I sold it right away. No need to put it anywhere."

"And where is the money you got?"

"Where?" Big Bay looked at Hai with round eyes. "How come you seem such a dotard these days? I spent all the money, of course."

Sweat trickled down Hai's forehead. Frowning, Big Bay said:

"To tell the truth, I've spent all that money on this breakfast. You can say I've just spent enough money for a bike."

Hai brought his glass down on the table.

"You son-of-a-bitch," he fumed, glaring into Big Bay's face with blood-shot eyes. "You're a wretched bike-thief."

Big Bay was stupefied, but he promptly replied in kind:

"And you, you're the same as I am. No different. You're a bike-thief, too."

Hai fell silent. Grumbling, he clenched his fists. Big Bay also angrily pushed back his chair and stood up. In a haughty voice, he said:

"You're kicking up a row with me today, aren't you? Ah ha... It's not child's play to lay your hands on me. Listen here, boy. I was an 'operational' soldier and I fought in all of the four 'tactical regions'. As for you, you've just escaped from prison. I'll cry out and the police will come and arrest you right away!"

Hai stood up, and hit Big Bay full in the face with his clenched fist, sending the fat and flabby hoodlum reeling and causing tables and chairs to fall like dominoes. People shouted aloud. Ignoring all this reaction, Hai sprang forward, grasped Big Bay by the collar, punched him in the face and kicked him in the groin. Both pleasure and anxiety were packed into each of his blows. For he knew that only in a short moment, the police would come and arrest both of them. He would be found guilty of a new breach of law: he had just fled the re-education school. He would be forced to return there, and would have to receive some kind of punishment reserved for those who fled from the camp. But he did not care. "Maybe the best thing for me is to go back to that school," he thought. "I am a culprit. And culprits must be put in a separate place reserved for them before being allowed to go home and live together with honest people."

The siren of a police car was blowing from afar, then the thud of running footsteps were heard, clearer and clearer...

Policemen closed in and led Hai and Big Bay away. It was still morning, and sunlight flooded the whole city.

March 1981  
HOANG NGOC TUAN

# CHRONOLOGY

(May 16 — June 15)

## MAY

17. The Council of Ministers passes a decision on scientific and technological work for the coming years.

— The Council of Ministers adopts a decision on the building and strengthening of the district level.

18. Opening in Hanoi of a joint meeting of various Vietnamese peace organizations and the Union of associations for solidarity and friendship with other peoples.

— Closing of an official friendship visit to Ethiopia by a delegation of the Communist Party of Vietnam, begun on May 15.

19. A delegation of the Vietnamese Party and State visits the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic.

— A delegation of the Vietnamese Ministry of Agriculture pays a friendship visit to Laos.

— A delegation of the Communist Party of Vietnam ends its friendship visit to Congo, begun on May 16.

20. Vietnam attends the World Acupuncture Conference held in Sofia, Bulgaria (May 15 — 20).

— A delegation of the Ministry of Public Health ends its friendship visit to Laos, begun on May 15.

23. Signing in Hanoi of an agreement on cooperation in the judiciary and legal fields between Vietnam and Kampuchea.

24. Soviet Minister of Gas Industry, S.V.A. Dinkov pays a visit to Vietnam.

— A spokesman for the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry issues a statement strongly condemning the South African authorities for its bomb attack on the suburban area of Mozambique's capital on May 23.

25. Opening in Ho Chi Minh City of a conference of the International Trade Union Movement against Chemical and Bacteriological Weapons.

27. A Swedish Government economic delegation ends its visit to Vietnam, begun on May 23.

— **Ho Chi Minh City:** Opening of a conference to review the implementation of the Politbureau resolution (August 1982) on the work of the City.

28. Signing in Hanoi of a programme for cultural exchanges between Vietnam and India for 1983 — 1985.

— Holding of the Second Congress of Vietnamese Apiculturists.

30. Signing in Berlin of a protocol on shipping and docking cooperation between Vietnam and the German Democratic Republic.

## JUNE

1. A cultural delegation of the Indian Government ends its visit to Vietnam, begun on May 27.

— Opening of an exhibition of paintings by Hanoi children.

2. 800,000 pupils of basic general education schools sit for their graduation exams.

5. The Mekong Interim Committee holds its 17th session in Bangkok.

7. Signing in Moscow of a plan for scientific and technological cooperation measures between the State Commissions for Science and Technology of Vietnam and the Soviet Union for the period 1983 — 1985.

8. Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach ends his official visit to the Philippines, begun on June 6.

9. Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach holds talks with Thai Foreign Minister Siddhi Savetsila in Bangkok.

11. Opening of the Congress of the Hanoi Branch of the CPV (second round).

12. A delegation of the France-Vietnam Friendship Association pays a visit to Vietnam.

13. Signing in Vientiane of a protocol on forestry cooperation between Vietnam and Laos.



## THE MEKONG RIVER DELTA

Photo 1, 2  
(See article on page 13)



Photos: VNA

3. Bags made of "buong" leaves in Quang Canh cooperative, Thuan Hai province.

Photo: THE THUAN



# LANDSCAPES IN VIETNAM

Ha Tien seashore.

Photo: BUI TAN



Lake Xuan Huong in Da Lat.

Photo: VAN BAO



Summer at Do Son beach—Hai Phong.

Photo: VAN PHUC

**Vietnam  
courier**

**HOBOCTW  
BETHAMA**

**Le courrier  
du Vietnam**

**El Correo  
de Vietnam**

Báo đối ngoại: **TIN VIỆT NAM**

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