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COMMUNISTS AND VIETNAMESE:

COMMENTS BY HOANG VAN CHI

Working Notes on Vietnam No. 7

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PREFACE

As with Vu Van Thai, I have spent many hours learning from Hoang Van Chi, in conversations at RAND since he became a consultant. This paper collects under several sub-headings my widely-scattered notes from a number of these conversations.

These were written either during our talks or soon after; although I wrote them largely in outline form (somewhat fleshed out here), I generally preserved Hoang's phrasing. Only half of a dialogue is presented here. Often Hoang's remarks responded to a comment by me, not shown here, rather than a direct question; so the questions shown here in brackets serve more as headings for the comments that follow. My own comments, also presented in brackets, were generally written along with the notes, only partly reflecting my side of the conversation.

Hoang's experience and perspective happens to complement that of Vu Van Thai valuably, conveniently for a RAND audience that has the chance to profit from both. Where Thai is acquainted with the thinking of the upper levels of the Lao Dong Party, in part from serving as non-communist member of the Central Committee of France of the Lien Viet, Hoang served as a middle-level Viet Minh administrator in North Vietnam (e.g., running a paper mill, producing currency) throughout the Resistance against the French. Hoang both observed and, later, suffered punishment (as a "landlord" owning 2.5 acres) in the communist "land reform" process of rural repression, which he described and analyzed in his almost-unique book, "From Colonialism to Communism." Both Thai and Hoang served the Diem Government: Thai, again, at the highest levels, Hoang in the Information Ministry (where he coined the phrase, "Viet Cong," short for Vietnamese communist, to replace the term Viet Minh then still in use; "I was Viet Minh," he points out).

After writing his book in Paris, Hoang came to Washington to work for USIA, the Voice of America, where he is still employed. As part of his job, he has kept current on North Vietnamese newspapers and other sources of information on North Vietnam.

Hoang Van Chi's thoughts on developments and potential strategies within South Vietnam are closely similar, or often complementary, to those of Thai. For some presentations of Thai's views, based like this paper on my notes, see:

D-19127-ARPA/AGILE - "Vu Van Thai On U.S. Aims and Intervention in Vietnam"

D-19128-ARPA/AGILE - "U.S. Support of Diem: Comments by Vu Van Thai"

D-19136-ARPA/AGILE - "Vu Van Thai On Pacification".

For notes from a RAND seminar by Chi on "Confucians and Communists," see D-19135-ARPA/AGILE. My own thinking has been significantly influenced by both, as by other Vietnamese, again, as it happens, generally of similar views.

THE PAST

ATTITUDES TOWARD THE FRENCH

Vietnamese see themselves as having become independent under the Japanese, March, 1945. Then Ho declared independence, under his government, the DRV, in August; Bao Dai recognized it, and Ho as leader.

So the French return was seen by all as an effort of reconquest, a new invasion/aggression/intervention/colonisation. The French pretended to come to "protect" Vietnam, though their failure in 1941 to keep out the Japanese had made their claim invalid.

In the first pro-Japanese government in 1945, there was no mandarin -- because the Japanese knew that the people hated mandarins more than the French. (Instead, there were teachers, doctors, soldiers...)

The people were, in fact, against the French largely because the French were the base of support for the mandarins. The Vietnamese had to throw out the French to get rid of the mandarins; thus they had a revolutionary motive, not just nationalism. At the end, Japanese arrested some youths (not Vietnamese). The Japanese did not interfere with Vietnam population; they let the French run things, just as before.

When de Gaulle came back, the French governor felt culpable for collaborating with the Japanese, and planned a coup against the Japanese. The Japanese knew of this, and had a coup three days earlier.

Otherwise (without the Japanese move): the Vietnamese would still have started a war; but the French would have had a province, army; Ho would not have had as much legitimacy; Ho would not have had power in Hanoi; the Viet Minh would have been more like the communists in Malaya.

The French wanted to work with the communists; they let them out of jail to help fight against the Japanese (but didn't get much from them).

In the 1930's, nationalists tried to overthrow the French, but communists didn't. They merely agitated; they didn't think it possible to overthrow the French.

But war weakened French control; and the communists foresaw that the precise moment when the Japanese were defeated would be a strategic moment. (The French were disarmed by the Japanese.)

Since Cochinchina was under French direct rule, French supervision was more efficient; as a result, there was less oppression by local officials than in Tonkin and especially less than in Annam [Central Vietnam], where the French let the hierarchy of mandarins exploit freely.

[Thus, was there less anti-French feeling in Cochinchina? Less revolutionary pressure: just because of a greater French role?! The adherence of the Sects to the French would seem to support this.]

However, anti-French feeling grew with each French repression following a revolt: even before the Yen Bay revolt (1930) and markedly after. Still, not all Vietnamese hated the French; many cooperated. The majority cared little about the French; especially peasants -- who didn't see French at all. They cared about poverty, and about the village chief, canton, district chief.

Those politically minded wanted independence, democracy, modernization; but they did not hate the French, like the hatred for Japanese in Korea or the Dutch in Indonesia. [However, Vu Van Thai makes the judgment -- consistent with this -- that local resentment against the French was very much deeper and broader than against the British in Malaya, or against Diem or the Americans.]

The French would have been tolerated if they had undertaken some reforms, e.g., to democratize the hierarchy of mandarins, modernize the system of law, and kept closer control on mandarins, prevented abuses and corruption. (Hoang believes that a promise of independence was not crucial: at least, less important).

The French appointed the district chief, a major; the canton chief was "elected," but this was manipulated by mandarins at provincial districts.

COMMUNIST TAKEOVER

In 1945-46, Viet Minh replaced most administrative services. District/province chiefs and staffs, and those who had worked for the French were removed: mandarins and subordinates. Technical staffs, e.g., in Ministries, were retained. The DRV disbanded completely the Vietnamese hierarchy of mandarins, coming down from the Emperor. The Ministry of Interior in Hue was disbanded. Then they put their men in place of French hierarchy; civil servants who had worked for the French were kept. When war broke out in December, 1946, these people left with the Viet Minh into the jungle. But many went back to the French later, though the Viet Minh tried to reeducate them.

Most chiefs were arrested by Viet Minh; only a few were killed. Most were wicked. But Thanh, Minister of Information under Diem, now Foreign Minister of the GVN, was in the Viet Minh for years, after being a district chief under the French.

Ho did not learn from Mao early -- Ho was a Stalinist. Later, the North Vietnamese studied Maoism, especially after Mao's success. In 1950-54 the Chinese gave main support. Chinese advisors were in every field: political, first; later, economic, military, land reform...their influence was almost absolute.

Chinese advice had a "radicalizing" effect: while fighting an imperialist enemy, carry out the creation of a communist regime; give land to peasants to get their enthusiasm against the imperialist. Till 1950, Ho concentrated on nationalism, patriotism, national unity, appealing to landlords. The Chinese said: this is not enough.

[Had Mao forgotten the successes of the later '30s, based on nationalism, compared to the failures of the early '30s? Or is this Chalmers Johnson thesis overdrawn? Or did Mao think that with Chinese support communists could "afford" to implement "land reform"?]

"In my opinion, it was not the distribution of land that promoted enthusiasm and effort, but terror. In the first wave, they beat everyone, frightened anyone into obedience." [More than Chicoms, in use of terror?] The Viet Cong, in contrast to the Viet Minh, don't seem to use so much violence against "landlords" -- only officials.

It would seem that Mao advised, and Ho followed, "land reform" methods during the war that the Chicoms themselves used only after taking power, and which they did not use during their war.

February 1953 -- first campaign of terror: "Political Struggle."

May 1953 -- first land reform, in Viet Minh areas.

There has been no counterpart, yet, in South Vietnam. [Does the Lao Dong now eschew Chicom method, used in North Vietnam?] Perhaps it will emerge when close to victory: both to win the war and to strengthen their position (establish proletariat dictatorship). To carry these out, the communists must already have firm authority in an area (they didn't do it close to French areas). This "land reform" is used to get a final supreme effort to win the war quickly. [If necessary: conceivably, it might not appear necessary in South Vietnam, to get the Americans out; or, it might appear after the Americans have left or stopped offensive action, as part of a supreme effort against RVNAP. If so, Hoang implies, it would appear first in areas most controlled by the Viet Cong; its victims, in the villages, would be "rich peasants" most of whom had collaborated with the Viet Cong, not with the GVN.]

Peasants were illiterate; they didn't think about politics. The educated saw that the French were behind the mandarins: which was why the French had to go.

The Viet Minh agitated people, taught them that the Japanese and French were the power behind the mandarins.

The United States took over this role exactly -- though it had been the base of opposition to the French. [I.e., in the same way, U.S. support was seen as crucial to the Diem regime.] In fact, the French are seen as more beneficial because they did intervene more;

Vietnamese could complain to them; when they became aware of excesses, the French would punish an official (e.g., for corruption over cotton production).

The moment of Viet Minh legitimacy and administration in Tonkin was crucial. In Tonkin the Viet Minh had their hands on the government machinery: August 1945 - December 1946. They ran services in Tonkin: Treasury, police, militia, education. French troops were slow to return; the Viet Minh had several years to grow (especially in North Vietnam and Central Vietnam, down to Hue). In contrast, the French came back almost immediately in Saigon and the South.

Before 1945, Indochinese Communist Party had only 5,000 members; and the Government was very strong; and there were not many communist sympathizers (because of competition from other nationalist parties).

The people were anti-government, but not pro-communist; they would not denounce communism to the French, but otherwise would not help them.

From 1932-36, there were almost no communists outside jails, the Party was on the edge of survival.

1934-42: The Party dropped in numbers, mostly in jail. In 1942, the French cooperated; they built bases. They carried out some propaganda against the Japanese, but no big effort; except one attack by Giap, to impress U.S. journalists.

In July 1945, 5,000 Party members (3,000 in jail) of the Viet Minh controlled a few areas -- Nge An, Thanh Hoa, and others near the Chinese border. The Viet Minh was only in a few villages (20-30 supporters in each); in none in many parts. Supporters (including families) numbered maybe 50,000.

In August, once the Viet Minh were in power, people applied for Viet Minh membership, spontaneously created cells, even pretended membership.

(Now, in North Vietnam, there are 700,000 in Lao Dong Party -- 4% of population -- plus youth organizations: a nursery for the Lao Dong.)

[Why did the Viet Cong grow in the South? (I.e., were there comparable reasons to the 1945-46 period in Tonkin?)]

(a) Negative factor: frustration with Diem, not over rule in Saigon but over the district/province chiefs he appointed.

(Though in 1956, the communists tried to keep Nambo Committee in existence; but Diem was still popular; people denounced them, and they had to run away, through Cambodia.)

(b) In anti-Diem fight, the Viet Cong had the prestige of having been anti-French fighters.

(c) The prestige of Diem began to go down with the referendum in 1956, between Bao Dai and himself. He was felt to be a usurper, using unfair methods. As appointed by Bao Dai, a former mandarin, he would be considered disloyal by Confucian standards if he should overthrow him. But in modern conditions, he could bypass that constraint, to overthrow Bao Dai in favor of a republic. He should have asked the question: "Bao Dai or republic?" Then in a second phase: an election in which Diem would run like everyone else, preferably after a constitution had been presented.

(d) People were happy about suppressing the Binh Xuyen; but there were bad rumors about the death of Trinh Minh The [probably killed by Nhu]; then, the death of Ba Cut, after Nguyen Ngoc Tho's father had arranged his surrender, alienated many Hoa Hao, who went into revolt.

It was "easy" to deal with Hoa Hao and Binh Xuyen, by political (corruption) and military means. But compared to these Sects, the Viet Cong had:

(a) Far better leadership; they were experts in revolution, students of revolution, experienced in war.

(b) Prestige from the earlier, successful war of liberation.

(c) Political training (unlike Hoa Hao); training of cadre, organization, good doctrine. The religious Sects worked on blind obedience; which was not as effective as communist indoctrination, motivation.

[(d) (Tony Russo) The Viet Cong always worked to intervene in the village, organize the village (like the Hoa Hao, Catholics). They didn't just deal with the village chief, like the GVN and the French, or allow the traditional autonomy. Diem, too, intervened during the strategic hamlet program: but he did not succeed in organizing, motivating the villagers.]

(e) Nation-wide appeal and organization.

(f) External support, from the DRV.

U.S. INTERVENTION AIMS

[What should the U.S. have done in South Vietnam in 1954?]

Given minimal necessary military aid; forced the regime to rely on its own resources, form coalitions, get popular support, avoid coercion, become efficient...

Diem would have fallen, at a time when this was less critical, e.g., 1960. [Was this too late?]

A new coalition government might then have confronted the Viet Cong effectively. [This would have raised the chance of a "cheap" "containment" of the Viet Cong, perhaps even "win," or, acceptable compromise. But it also raised the chance of short-run "loss." It would have lowered the chance of a long fighting stalemate: though it also lowered the cost of this. We put greatest emphasis on avoiding loss in short-run -- which we could best do by big U.S. aid -- at the price of a high probability of expensive, prolonged stalemate (and perhaps, big, or bigger, chance of loss in the long-run, though not in short). We underestimated the desirability of (a) a compromise, (b) keeping U.S. cost and involvement down, (c) avoiding a long, costly stalemate. And we greatly overestimated the likelihood of a total Win -- which was probably close to 0 -- especially by methods used; ironically, Hoang's approach above may really have had a greater -- i.e., a small positive -- likelihood of this, unappreciated by us.]

A nation that relies heavily on foreign aid to survive -- doesn't need its people, needn't listen to them or respond to them -- can rely on coercion (in the short run), be arrogant. Hence it will not develop the capability to deal effectively with a strong, organized internal threat without foreign aid.

Asian communists, on the other hand, insist: "learn from the people... listen to the people... [This -- Mao's emphasis on the "mass line" -- and not only coercion, indoctrination and surveillance, helps make such societies less vulnerable to subversion.]

A regime relying on foreign support will have the spirit of a contractor: contracting with the foreign power X to provide stability, beat Communists, serve interests of X, in return for support.

Like a contractor, the leader will try to share power with relatives and friends, but limit participation otherwise, to the minimum necessary to "do the job". He will oppose any non-controlled organization, for fear that contract will be switched to another group. And he is right to fear this; every group wants to "get the bid."

Hoang tried to get several nationalists together in Paris -- as rival to Diem -- but each wanted to be President.

In contrast, Ho in 1945 knew he needed broadest possible support. He asked everyone to participate, made jobs for all [then destroyed competition in 1945-46!]

[Vu Van Thai disagrees with this interpretation. In the case of South Vietnam, he thinks most ruling groups, from Diem on, have felt the U.S. could not easily switch support away from them, so their tendency to crush organized competitors has reflected simply internal power considerations. Nor have they felt compelled to be especially responsive to U.S. desires or interests.]

WHO COULD HAVE BEATEN THE VIET CONG?

Only those with experience in the Viet Minh. More important than communist technique they would have learned would have been a "new spirit" -- to get rid of the feeling of superiority, arrogance. A non-communist dictatorship in Vietnam cannot be as effective as a communist one, with its cadre, organization, experience, ideology. A non-communist dictatorship will be a personal one.

The ordinary Vietnamese wants just government, whether authoritarian or democratic, preferably the former (in order to modernize, develop). But the trouble with the former is the likelihood of degenerating into personal despotism, unless controlled by some form of "constitution," or a clergy, or a code of ethics (such as bound the Emperor; it doesn't exist now) or elections.

Formerly, if the chief of district didn't conform to codes, Confucian scholars and clergy would disapprove, people would resist, even revolt. Confucian scholars have died out; the last exams were in 1917; none were left to control the Diem administration.

One must have both a code of ethics and elections; "In a country of bandits, elections will elect a bandit." To make a revolution or to fight one, you need dedicated cadres; but the GVN opposes a corps of cadres with a machinery of fonctionnaires. A man does not become a "civil servant" to die for anything. He joins to live for himself: to enjoy an assured income, status, a peaceful life. [Ellsberg corollary to the Hoang postulate: Civil servants can't "mobilise" people and RD cadre are like civil servants.]

The GVN needs an army of cadres -- more than soldiers. Moreover, a doctrine. Lenin: No revolution without revolutionary faith; and for this, one needs both good leaders and effective doctrine. The Day Dan philosophy promulgated to RD cadre by Capt. Mai [in the CIA-supported training program for RD cadres at Vuong Tau.] is outdated. An effective doctrine must first be accepted by intellectuals; then cadres; then people. Legends that no one believes will be immediately rejected by intellectuals -- with no chance to be accepted.

Except -- one could go with it directly to villages, like the Hoa Hao. Hoa Hao, Catholicism, etc. are useful as factors of religious sentiment -- as factors of resistance to a competing movement.

Buddhists are too conservative; they are like Makarios: "good supporters." Tri Quang, and a few others, could be politicians -- probably despotic. But only these.

Students are the only hope. [Tran Ngoc Chau has a similar opinion.] There is a cycle of revolutions in Vietnam; about 13 years long: 1932, 1945, 1946...[1963,-64, '66?]

This is because movements are started by young people: 15-25 years old. One must wait for young people who didn't see and don't remember how the last revolt was repressed; then, they must get

experience, organization... Dong, Giap, Hoang, Suu: all started in the student movement in 1926 which spread from college to elementary school. When the movement was suppressed, Dong fled to China; Hoang, in elementary school, was expelled and prevented from taking examinations. (In 1930, in Hanoi, Hoang lived in the same house with Giap.) In 1929, the same students carried on revolt. Hoang found it hopeful to see student participation in 1963 revolt; he expected something more serious later: e.g., in 1966, Buddhists Struggle -- but it failed to appear. These youths lacked older guides, to inspire them.

Students distrust communists because of their use of terror -- which communists used in Saigon in 1945. Giau, the communist leader in the South, was very bloodthirsty in Saigon in 1945, using youth as his vanguard. He killed many Trotskyites.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN COMMUNIST EXPLICIT APPEALS?

Communist nationwide propaganda -- then and now -- is against "rule by imperialists, through puppets" not so much against local government. [This is combined, locally, with propaganda against local authorities.] Only by fighting against foreigners can you get the nationalism appeal (a stronger emotion than revolution/reform, with recruits and cadres and the educated, even though not with peasant sympathisers.)

But peasants are more against unjust local government, interested in changing this (not in nationalism). Local communist actions are designed to appeal to this motive.

The Viet Cong didn't say Diem was actually a puppet, but that there was a collaboration; My - Diem. Afterwards, they did not refer to My - Khanh, My - Ky, etc.: the latter men were regarded as mere puppets.

- Communist appeal: 1) to peasants: just administration,
administrative reform;
- 2) to cadres and youth: 1st stage - nationalism
2nd stage - class conflict,
Marxism;

- 3) later, to peasants: land reform and
nationalism.

By now, with Viet Cong propaganda and education, peasants are awakened to nationalism.

As for representation, elections: Villagers did elect chiefs [though not on a Western model] from the dawn of history -- they did not need to learn this from the West. French manipulated this; and Diem ended it.

Higher officials needed technical skills, so there was less pressure for election.

Earlier, mandarins were relatively just, qualified, severely controlled by Imperial Censors. This began to break down under the French, who wanted control.

Peasants wanted village and canton chief to be elected; they wanted district/provincial officials (technical) to be honest, just; they saw this as assured by:

- (1) a good regime in the capital
- (2) inspection, control,
- (3) codes of ethics.

Educated people -- e.g., in provincial towns, capitals -- wanted an elected Representative Assembly, to control the central government and provincial officials. They got this from French education. (Hoang's father was in Poulo Condore, 1905-1912: he had been in the Scholar's Movement to throw out French. His grandfather, also, had been a nationalist.)

The French did have elections -- even, fair ones -- but the assembly had only consultative power. In 1936, communists were elected in Hanoi to the City Council. Many Trotskyites were elected.

Hoang agrees with Lansdale: peasants can quickly be educated to attach great importance to elections -- of province officials, National Assembly, Prime Minister -- as a means of achieving just government. Communists propose elections -- as a means to just administration.

Regional feeling is, in communist eyes, and nowadays in reality in the North and among communist cadre, only strong among those without patriotism; the negative test of patriotism is the relative strength (absence) of anti-South or anti-North feeling.

Communists appeal to patriotism, try to eradicate regional feeling: this is now absent among elites in North Vietnam. Southern/Central leaders in the North are subject to no prejudice.

The NLF uses Southern leadership to appeal to the masses in the South (and foreign audiences). But Southern cadres will not resent Northern cadres or troops as such; their propaganda emphasizes kinship.

[But is regional feeling more important in South than North; is this possibly a factor of resistance to communist-style "patriotism"?]

[Why do ARVN, Hoa Hao, etc. fight as hard as they do against the Viet Cong?]

ARVN: They think they would be killed. (They are probably wrong.)

And, they have been fighting long, see the Viet Cong as a direct enemy. Hoa Hao, Catholics -- like Catholics in the North -- simply follow their leaders, who protect their own interests. Communists would destroy the leadership, not masses. If the communists won, the masses would discover this and would no longer be anti-communist. Kerala, the most Catholic state in India, is a communist state. Catholic authoritarianism engenders strong Marxists in Italy, France. (Marxism is especially weak in Protestant countries.)

There are two generations of Catholic priests now in North Vietnam:

- (a) Village priests: Vietnamese education, "black teeth" (from betel nuts), dogmatic;
- (b) Western-educated, liberal.

North Vietnamese party cadre like the former.

[If the South Vietnamese saw conditions now in North Vietnam clearly, and expected the same in South Vietnam: What would they feel about it?]

Almost no one in South Vietnam actually knows much, if anything, about North Vietnamese land reform; letters from the North are censored, oblique. Catholics left before the Viet Minh arrived in villages (no one could leave afterwards). Diem and the GVN were not interested in informing peasants about North Vietnam's regime. [Did they fear that some aspects might be too appealing, or suggestive?]

[Thus, Hoang implies, the rural South Vietnamese are mainly unaware of the major thing they have to fear from a Viet Cong takeover. The GVN derives little support from public awareness of the principal interest -- a large one -- that villagers, other than the poorest, realistically have in avoiding a communist victory.]

In the Delta, peasants looking at conditions "now" (before 1965, when bombing started) in North Vietnam would dislike:

- (a) being forced to work so hard (now they have an easy life, working only three months a year, in contrast to Central Vietnam);
- (b) no more luxury articles;
- (c) fake village elections.

The poor, in all parts of South Vietnam, would like:

- (a) relative privileges, status;
- (b) promotion, social advancement;
- (c) some chance for work in offices, "not under the rain";
- (d) Also security (especially important in poor, famine areas of Central Vietnam.) The rich would lose their position.

Collectivization was bad in the first years in North Vietnam; now, Hoang has an impression of improvement. (They gave 5% of land back to private plots; 5% for cows grazing). 80% of families are in cooperatives. Peasants in North Vietnam feel they have to work too much: because of successive crops, full use of labor potential.

There are many landless peasants in the Mekong Delta; but they are not needy. Under collectivization they would work harder; pay taxes (though not rent); their standard of living would not be higher; though they would get better consideration in services (courtesy from officials, access to hospitals, schools); they would get no luxuries (cigarets, beer).

On the whole, peasants in the Delta would rather enjoy life than have "consideration." In the Center, after the mistakes of the first years, peasants would be better off, pleased at the change.

All would see in North Vietnam a relatively just society and administration (including law) -- especially compared to Diem and his successors.

The poor in South Vietnam feel hatred of rich -- especially, new arrogant rich. This is not so much a conflict of class, but a feeling of humiliation and injustice. Inherited rich who behave well are not resented; rather, the new arrogant rich who oppress them.

Envy, jealousy goes with egalitarian strain: which works against development of capitalism, but leads to sympathy for the claims and for the actual practices of communism.

Communists promise only equality, just government: not high standard of living. The U.S. gives aid -- which makes rich richer, disparity greater. The effect is to promote communism. The peasant is glad to get fertilizer -- till he sees a man with a Mercedes, which he got as a result of U.S. aid policy.

[Is egalitarianism so strong in other Asian countries? e.g., China, Indonesia, Malaya? Is it culturally related to Chinese/Confucian influence? Is it as strong in the Delta as in the Center and North?]

U.S. AID says, Give peasants fertilizer and they become wealthy. But the peasant says, after the Viet Cong talks to him, "If I become wealthy, an official will ask me for money; if I refuse, he will call me Viet Cong; wealth brings trouble....".

Under communists, the people in South Vietnam who would really do better, [contrary to Communist ideology] are the petit bourgeoisie: minor civil servants, accountants, tradesmen, minor intellectuals...[!]

- (a) They will be taken into the cadre: and their children who are educated enough.
- (b) Their children, having higher qualifications, will be sent to college in China and Russia.

In theory, peasant children would get preference; in practice, they are not educated enough. Children of the rich, and rich landlords will be excluded.

- (c) They would not be subject to land reform.

Worst "enemy" -- who will lose most -- will be the rich in towns, and middle peasants still in the countryside, who will be classed with the rich.

Party leadership -- upper and middle -- comes from the middle class. Poor peasants predominate only in hamlet/village cadre.

[Is North Vietnam now worse off for Communist regime?]

If it weren't for Ho Chi Minh and his Communist leadership, the war against the French would have been much shorter -- like Tunisia or Morocco, perhaps with very little fighting. And North Vietnam would not be destroyed now, with nothing to show after 14, or 23 years. I.e., if the revolt had not been Communist, the U.S. would not have supported the French; world opinion would have opposed the French; the French would have given independence much sooner; and the country would have been unified; so there would have been no war of liberation in the South, no U.S. bombing of South or North.

[To American ears, it is startling, and sobering to hear and reflect upon what it is that comes first to the thoughts of a patriotic Vietnamese as the principal -- damning -- disadvantage to Vietnam of Ho's leadership: that by his communism alone, he called down great destruction on his country, from American firepower.]

Not only his subject -- the installation of Communist rule -- but the period of which he wrote, ending in 1956, led to the mainly negative tone of Hoang's book, "From Colonialism to Communism"; the more positive achievements of the DRV had not yet appeared. In South China and North Vietnam, one finds a communist country trying intensive growth in agricultural production. Ho Chi Minh always emphasized this.

In general, the time to invade a communist regime would be about in its fifth year. It is then at its weakest and most unpopular; it must be harsh, but no results are available yet, and organizations not built yet.

But after the 10th year they have corrected mistakes, gotten experience; a new generation has been educated, the old generation that knows another life is older, weaker, purged out of office, so there is less chance of a mass revolt; though a growing chance of internal conflict inside the Party.

In 1956 there was a peasant revolt in Nghe An; but not now.

In the first stage of collectivization, with mistakes, with peasant resistance, agricultural production goes down (though it is communist intent to increase it, as well as to assure supply of agricultural production -- to cities, and export).

1954-56: Land reform, mistakes, hardship. 1956-60, 1962 still bad; food shortage; many left cooperatives.

Now, in North Vietnam control is more sophisticated, effective; production in private plots; better irrigation; technical advice; green and chemical fertilizer (though they still use human manure). Now many cooperatives are doing well; in some, 55 tons/hectare. (Yet the food problem is worse than ever; mainly due to the population increase.)

Thus, Chi's negative expectations, as in his article in Honey's volume on North Vietnam, have not all been borne out. In the long-run, communism overcomes many difficulties. E.g., on the maintenance of dikes: [Hoang foresaw, in the article cited above, lack of sufficient incentive for peasants in cooperatives to do the constant dike maintenance required, or to use human manure as intensely.] They use larger fields, hence larger dikes, easier to maintain.

Chi did not expect them to develop an electric network so fast, or bring pumps to villages.

Bad effects of communism with respect to agricultural policy are likely to appear in the first five years: before mistakes are corrected.

But in South Vietnam, agricultural production will rise sharply in peace; also, Southerners are sloppy producers, because land is so rich. On both grounds, communism could increase production (more than non-communists would; incentives matter, yet Southerners have less incentive, don't need to work as hard).

Communists learn from mistakes, experience, yet some mistakes are almost inherent in their doctrine: e.g., the use of terror (though perhaps more discriminating in the South -- depending on who controlled in Politburo: maybe Giap is less dogmatic).

An early threat -- 1965 -- to hit all North Vietnam industry might have faced Ho with a Party upheaval, caused him to draw back. Now only a revolution in China could offset the North Vietnamese role: hence, the likelihood that a communist takeover would mean DRV influence and methods. If ever communists in some or all countries come to depart from reliance on terror, "they will be very powerful." Maybe Czechs and Yugoslavians point the way.

[Are Marxists "Violent Confucians"?] No -- the notion of thesis -- antithesis is too naive, not Confucian enough: primitive compared to concepts of Yin and Yang, 25 centuries earlier, though the approaches are very compatible. [See D-19135, Hoang on "Communists and Confucians."]

If communists could avoid excess of violence, communists would be good for a less-developed country. They are, and create, modern men. And they do evolve that way, towards less violence, starting in Europe. Russian communism now downplays violence after Stalin (see fate of Khrushchev); though Maoism is still more violent. Hoang suspects that killing continues in China -- behind the coercion. Anyway, there is a great deal of "moral violence."

[Would communism in all ways be bad for South Vietnam?]

Many Vietnamese, including anti-communists, think the best thing for South Vietnam would be for the communists to rule for several years; "Only they can throw out the corrupt elements, and only they have cadre to replace them."

Also, communists -- in reality, only they -- will greatly increase agricultural production, with new techniques.

IS HO CHI MINH A NATIONALIST OR A COMMUNIST?

Hoang poses this old question, and finds an answer in the Indian story of how tigers were created:

The King, Queen, and councillors of an Indian State were given a magic formula by a wise man in the jungle, in a "magic bag," to help them out of danger (they were afraid of invasion). Lost in the jungle on their return, with no way to get food, they opened the bag and read the formula; whereupon they turn into tigers. They leap out and eat smaller animals and thus stay alive. But they are no longer human; they can't read or speak or read other formulas and they can't return to human form.

The notion of a "magic bag" containing the answer to all difficulties is a common one in Vietnamese folklore. Hoang first thought of this fable when he saw Ho had written: "When I first read Marxism, I saw it as a 'magic bag'..."

[See Lacouture, Ho Chi Minh, New York, 1966, p. 31-32: (Ho Chi Minh, "The Path Which Led Me to Leninism," L'Echo du Vietnam, July 1960).

IF COMMUNISTS WERE ACTUALLY TO TAKE OVER IN SOUTH VIETNAM, WHAT REPRESSIVE POLICIES SHOULD BE EXPECTED, ON PAST EXPERIENCE?

Nothing could stop the VC/DRV from imposing "land reform" terror. Its purpose: a "play" to educate peasants that the wish to own land or property is sinful and dangerous.

About 1% of the population were killed in the 1952-56 land reform. This meant 10 in an average village of 1,000. Two or three of these were killed in the "political struggle," prior to land reform in 1953; one or two in "land rent reduction campaign" in 1954; ≥ 5 in "land reform campaigns" after Dienbienphu, in Viet Minh-controlled areas.

In other areas, the DRV did the whole campaign at once, as "land reform" in 1956, after Haiphong closed. [i.e., after the French evacuated Haiphong, closing this escape hatch.]

(Now, in Kwang-si, anti-Mao forces are doing the same thing as Maoists; denunciations, signs around the neck, etc.)

It is possible that the Lao Dong feels it was a mistake to imitate the Chinese to that extent; they may be more flexible now.

Chi expects they will not do it during the war; and will be more selective, avoid unnecessary, excessive violence, later.

In 1954-56 very few city-dwellers were killed, even ex-landlords, or people who had supported the French. They only tried Hanoi/Haiphong citizens who owned land in surrounding villages: cities were not involved in the "land reform." The communists needed the technical know-how of bourgeois exporters, factory-owners, engineers.

The landlords in the villages were killed to teach the peasants a lesson: to "educate" them not to wish to be a landlord. They wanted to kill the spirit of ownership (and to teach compliance in general, avoidance of guerilla activity).

Workers don't have to be taught such a lesson; they don't aspire to ownership, and are already compliant.

In the countryside, teaching activities were protected and encouraged. In the South, communists would want to eliminate rivals and anyone with rival prestige: not former enemies, per se, most of whom would lack any prestige or influence. They would kill many Buddhists (as in 1954-56; not Catholics); even more, respected Confucians. Many of these victims might earlier have sympathized with, and some actually supported the Viet Cong.

On takeover, the communists would: (a) proclaim magnanimity; (b) accept any who would repent (except hard-core "lackeys," Ky/Thieu/Loan); (c) then promote "land-reform": kill "neutralists" who are not pro-communist (not those who were pro-U.S., pro-GVN: these must simply make a public statement, confession, since they would be discredited anyway, no rivals.) The communists will not kill refugees, or ARVN officials (they will be sent home). The communists would not kill Suu at once; they would try to get a statement from him favoring the regime. Huong would refuse: they would kill him.

In the countryside, the communists would kill 1%. (In North Vietnam, they killed about 120-130,000; and many more died in jail, suicide, and families starved. The latter -- the starving of families -- communists might not repeat in South Vietnam; it was later judged "not necessary"). They would kill 1%; plus 1-3% would die otherwise, if no starvation policy; or 2-3% if starvation was used (families were prevented from leaving their house; they were labelled "enemies of the people," and no contact with others permitted.)

They would denounce and kill the leaders of the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai as "landlords,"; criminals: charged with rapes, murders and political crimes (spies, worked for U.S.); they would kill those with prestige. They would not kill Catholic leaders, for fear of international reaction; they would destroy their prestige, not kill them. They would follow a flexible policy on Montagnards; an autonomous regime, with selective use of force, party apparatus. The Viet Cong would treat them better than the GVN, be kind; admit them to college, Institute of Montagnards in Saigon; they have already introduced an alphabet. They would gradually try to reeducate membership of Hoa Hao and Cao Dai; accuse their leaders of immorality; introduce communist leaders, cooperatives. They would treat them like Catholics in North Vietnam.

Half of Northern Catholics remained in North Vietnam: or 700,000. In the first year, they showed resistance, but they were won over. Many joined cooperatives. No priests were killed; and the communists were more selective in killing Catholic peasants. The regime has been suspicious of them politically, but no economic discrimination.

Catholic refugees in South Vietnam were privileged. Before Diem, Catholics were less educated; they produced no scholars. Under Diem, only Catholics got scholarships abroad; some converted for this reason.

In North Vietnam, those who worked for the French were not wiped out; public servants continued to work, for the same salary, though Viet Minh cadres got small pay. Most technicians left. Provincial officials left -- they would have been killed (as criminals) -- but not public servants in cities. Now, province/district officials have no excuses; they would be killed. CIDG would be killed; RD cadre -- long term prison. They have "no excuse" for their anti-communist propaganda; though their behavior at the last moment might be an excuse.