

## VIETNAMESE SOCIETY IN TRANSITION



# VIETNAMESE SOCIETY IN TRANSITION

**The daily politics of reform and change**

**John Kleinen**  
(editor)



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## Vietnamese society in transition

### The daily politics of reform and change

Vietnamese society has been evolving at a fast pace. The Asian financial crisis, which began in 1997, hit Vietnam rather late, and with less severity as compared with other south-eastern Asian countries such as Thailand and Indonesia. Economic growth slowed down considerably, and the construction and service sectors were hardest affected. Ethnic tension remained at a manageable level in a society where the dominant group nominally accepts the co-existence of minorities. Unemployment, a serious problem already, worsened with the deepening crisis. On top of all this, a disturbing wave of rural unrest manifested in demonstrations and other forms of protest against widespread corruption and abuse of power, caused great concern to the leadership in Hanoi who managed to maintain its grip on the social and political activities of the populace. While the crisis was often blamed for a slackening in the reform process, domestic policies were regarded as the main cause for the stagnation and malaise, which are felt today.

After the economic reforms of the early and mid nineteen eighties had ushered in a period of relative openness and prosperity, the end of the nineteen nineties saw a new phase of retardation and a stalemate position of the Communist Party in power. The leadership professes that the legal framework, refined by the State during the last ten years, provides the citizens with adequate democratic rights, including the rights to free expression and of freedom of religion, but in the meantime it gives ample warning against hostile internal and external *forces*. Yet many Vietnamese deeply resent the ambivalent way the government and party defend these freedoms on one hand, but allow continuous corruption, political discrimination and the payment of lip service to the lawmaking process on the other hand. As the new century sets in, a general sense of pessimism is felt when it comes to the chances of creating the civil society so many Vietnamese used to believe in a decade ago.

This volume explores the impact on everyday life of the most crucial political and economic transformations, which occurred in Vietnam since 1986. The late nineteen eighties show a Vietnam still wrestling with the abolishment of a centrally planned economy and searching for its place in the international community after having been isolated and boycotted for so many years for its occupation of Cambodia and (implicitly) for its victory over the United States earlier on. As the experience of other south-eastern Asian nations has shown, however,

it is nigh impossible to open up the country to the global flows of capital without allowing the flows of culture and information into the country as well. Farmers have benefitted from the liberalisation of the markets. The rationale behind Vietnam's opening up to the world market was driven by the grass-roots efforts of peasant households in the early nineteen eighties who abandoned the collectivised system and engaged in private contracts with the cooperatives. This led to an upsurge of rice production. In the nineteen nineties Vietnam became the second global player on the rice export market. And the country was to improve on this earlier performance: today Vietnam is the first most important rice exporter in the world. Vietnam's (gradual) participation in the global economy engendered a localisation process which did upset the ruling communist party, but was very much to the liking of the emerging middle classes in the major Vietnamese cities.

The chapters in this volume reflect the work of scholars who presented papers at the third Euroviet Conference held in Amsterdam (July 1997). We then ascertained that, compared to the rest of Southeast and East Asia, contemporary Vietnamese society is still an under-researched area. This is still true today. Especially in-depth studies on rural life, on the revival of religion and on changing gender-roles are negligible – although scholarly access to the field is progressing. We decided, four years after the third Euroviet Conference, to publish a selection of the (rewritten) papers in the two official conference languages for the following reasons.

Firstly, there is the advantage of having brought together many well-known scholars working on Vietnam and of having introduced younger scholars working in the same field of research. Secondly the book focuses on the lives of ordinary Vietnamese: how did *they* experience the important political and socio-economic changes over the last ten or fifteen years in their everyday life? Thirdly, the authors, especially the Vietnamese among them, take up an insider's position. Unlike many observers who look at grass-roots developments from a distance, our authors are implicated in the processes they study. In short, this book will make an important contribution to the scientific literature on Asian local cultures, the social trends in rural Southeast Asia in general, and on the contradictions inherent in societal transformation under socialist regimes in particular.

The eight chapters on rural transformation are the culmination of a vast amount of research dealing with the relationships between economic reform, small industry development and poverty alleviation. Participants of the French-financed Fleuve Rouge programme (Pascal Bergeret, Jean-Philippe Fontenelle, Mai Van Hai, Ghislaine Mellac and Christophe Gironde) present the results of their longitudinal fieldwork in different provinces of North Vietnam (Hai Duong, Hai Hung, Vinh Phu and Bac Thai). The fate of the agricultural cooperatives and their remaining role in the new market system is vividly discussed

by Yanagisawa Masayuki and Yasuyuki Kono (Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University) and Ingrid Schraner (Marquiere University, NSW, Australia). The findings of long term socio-economic research on innovative trends – notably in the handicraft sector, the far-reaching effects of the only just launched renovation policy and their impact on education are being presented by Nguyen Van Chinh (University of Hanoi). A scholar of the same university, Le Van Sinh discusses the increasing level of wealth and the widening gap between rich and poor in the countryside.

The chapters on religion and religious revival deal with popular cults such as *the Pure Land Sect* in Southern Vietnam (Do My Thien, National University of Singapore), the re-inventing of tradition in a post-colonial socialist society by the veneration of heroes and emulation-workers (Benoît de Tréglodé, Centre National de Recherche Scientifique, France) and the role of rituals and religion (Nguyen Van Ky, Université de Paris VII). The anthropology of religion is rather closely linked to the theory of practice, leaving the interpretation of texts and theological aspects to other disciplines. Of considerable interest is the phenomenon of secular religion embodied in the worship of revolutionary heroes who became communal deities. Would *religious revival* be the right term to describe what is happening in Vietnam today? The resurgence of religious activities throughout the country during the past decade as described in several chapters of the present book certainly seems to indicate the term *is* appropriate. And although official Vietnamese policy on the role of rituals and religion did not change dramatically, as can be shown by the new Constitution of 1992, and official approval for holding festivals and for reopening of cult and worshipping places is still required, it seems state intervention is rather limited. The State, seeking popular legitimisation, recognises tacitly that Buddhism and – to varying degrees – other religions fit into *the tradition of the people* and are therefore permitted to be practised.

While trying to cope with a society changing at a fast pace by inventing or re-inventing local traditions on many an occasion, the State might well be paving the way for a return to village autonomy, which would eventually result in a restructuring of the existing administrative pattern. On the other hand if it should choose to restrict the people's traditional practices the State would lose its legitimacy. Nowadays, party regulations have lost much of their coercive power: not only are rituals and ceremonies coming back, but also feasting and the holding of banquets (made possible by the acquisition of new wealth) have been revived within the villages led by the emerging elites.

Under the theme *The family, sexuality and body politics* Marie-Corine Rodriguez (Institut d' Histoire Comparée des Civilisations) and Annick Guénel (Centre National de Recherche Scientifique/Institut de Recherche pour le Développement) analyse the control over commercial sex during colonial times through municipal regulations (the rules governing marriage and interethnic

relations; fiscal and health regulations). In colonial discourses – legal, moral, and medical – one observes an obsession with the *social body* – especially when it came to its most private parts. *Unstable elements*, as were called women in the prostitution business in those days, were subjected to such control. *Instability* was solely defined in public-health terms when it concerned sexual encounters in public places or in military camps. But it was also defined in cultural terms when *instability* involved the *immoral* co-habitation of French civil servants and indigenous women. The view that venereal diseases were female diseases provided (a) legitimacy for intervention by the colonial State in the female body, and (b) incarceration of female prostitutes in the interest of public health and of the health of the colonial army. This aspect of the Foucaultian concept of *bio-power* of the State in contemporary Vietnam is neatly covered by Tine Gammeltoft (University of Copenhagen) who shows how the notion of *womanhood* as a socially constructed category is triangulated, i.e. it is mediated through three entities, namely the woman's body, the family and the State. The legitimacy of state intervention in women's bodies is based on the (constructed causal) relationship between fertility control, family happiness and national wealth.

The urban setting of contemporary Vietnam appears in the chapters written by Khuat Thu Hong (National Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities, Hanoi) and Danièle Bélanger (University of Western Ontario), who look at the issue of mate selection in urban North Vietnam in two periods, 1960-1986 (prior to renovation) and 1987-1993 (during the renovation). The freer choice young people now enjoy, although family approval remains vitally important, illustrates the changing role of the State in marriage decisions. Emphasis is no longer principally laid on political considerations. When it comes to partner choice, lifestyle and reasons of an economical nature tend to be the decisive factors today. The construction of *ideal* occupations, *ideal* beauty for women and the *ideal* housewife is geared towards the emerging middle classes. A concluding chapter (Marie-Eve Blanc) on the way the role of women is depicted through several periods of times in Vietnamese women's magazines, clearly shows how largely the notion of temporality is related to the emancipation of women.

The editor is grateful for the support of Truong Thanh Dam (Institute of Social Studies in the Hague) who kindly subjected the gender issues papers to her expertise. Benoît de Tréglodé and Marijke Jalink have been very helpful in giving their editorial advice on the papers written in French. Cao Xuan Tu provided valuable assistance in improving the quality of the texts of those contributors whose native language – as can be said of the undersigned's mother tongue – is not English. The International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) and the Euroviet-III sponsors provided the necessary funding to publish this book. Heleen van der Minne (IIAS) must be praised for her most thorough revision of

both the English and the French texts and for her diligent overhauling of the references. Expert assistance in preparing the final manuscript was given by Marijke Jalink of Het Spinhuis Publishers.

A little note on the way the Vietnamese names and terms have been rendered in this book. We have reproduced personal names in the order dictated by Vietnamese custom: family name, middle name, first name. The use of an overall Vietnamese font posed a problem due to the several authors who contributed to this book. Some authors, especially those who have shared their views in the French language, have shown a strong preference for the use of some diacritical marks on Vietnamese terms: the traditional 'Viêt Nam' instead of the more colloquial 'Vietnam', for instance. In order to be in line with the way most authors have chosen to write down their contributions, the editor and the publisher tried to avoid those marks on Vietnamese words as much as possible. Yet, for typographical and other reasons it was not always possible to apply this principle as an absolute rule.

John Kleinen (editor)  
Amsterdam, January 2001



PART I

Rural transformation





# Changing roles of cooperatives in agricultural production in the Red River Delta

A case study of the Coc Thanh cooperative in Nam Dinh province

MASAYUKI YANAGISAWA<sup>1</sup> & YASUYUKI KONO<sup>2</sup>

Since the introduction of a market economy and private farming, agricultural cooperatives are believed to have lost a great deal of their authority, converting to service organisations for member farmers. It has also been reported that agricultural productivity in the Red River Delta rapidly increased both in terms of cropping intensity and yield during this period of change, although the technical background regarding the increase has not yet been examined. The present study, therefore, focuses on (1) changes in cropping pattern and agricultural production at the village level after *Doi Moi*, particularly from the technical viewpoint and (2) changing roles of the agricultural cooperatives in the same period. The Coc Thanh cooperative in Nam Dinh province, located at the lowest part of the Red River Delta, was chosen for the present study. Three major conclusions were reached; (1) a wide range of new agricultural technologies, including new varieties of rice and other crops, techniques for seedling, and small pumps for farm-level water management and winter crops have been introduced by cooperatives and the farmers themselves through trial and error, resulting in increased agricultural productivity; (2) cooperatives play a key role in introducing some of the new technologies, but it is not always necessary in farm-level farming management; (3) cooperatives have maintained important roles in information exchange, coordination in agriculture and water management between the member farmers and the outside society, and promotion of member farmer's investments in appropriate agricultural production and diversification of farming systems.

After introducing a series of renovation policies (*Doi Moi*) which shifted the economy toward a market mechanism operation, it is well known that Vietnam's agriculture has greatly changed. In particular, Resolution 10 on the renovation of agricultural management on 5 April 1988, can be considered an epoch-making policy in agriculture (Murano 1989: 28-29). Resolution 10 affirmed that the 'contract system' should be perfected and deals with each and every peasant household, land should be allocated by contract, on a stable basis, for a period of 10 to 15 years, with contracts valid for 5 years (Duc 1995: 56). Furthermore, Resolution 5 on June 1993, extended land users' rights and ensured farmers

investment in land improvement in order to multiply seasonal crops (Cuc 1995: 102; Luat Dat Dai 1995: 7; Iwai 1996: 83).<sup>3</sup> In the past, farmers belonged to a group farming system managed by cooperatives and were not allowed to select the crops themselves. This is one of the reasons why agricultural productivity failed to increase. However, the above-mentioned renovation policy – on agriculture, that is – transition to privatisation and a market economy, gave the farmer high incentives to produce and, as a result, agricultural productivity increased and farming systems diversified.

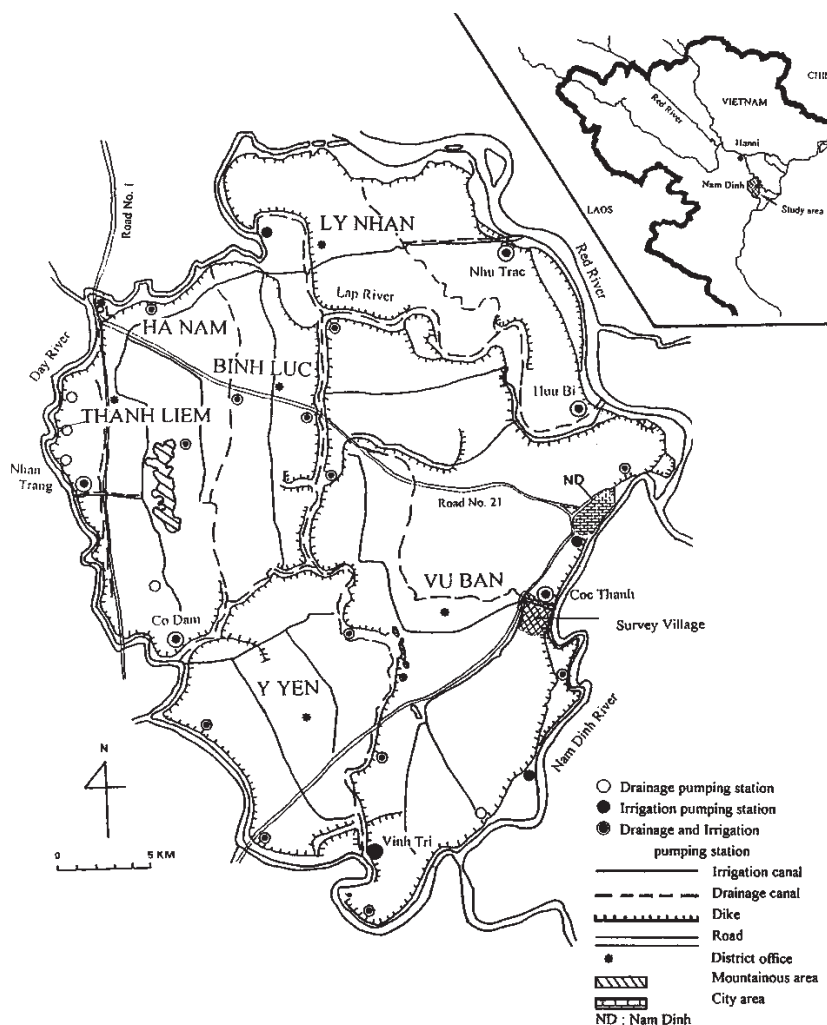
The role of agricultural cooperatives has changed considerably since *Doi Moi* and varies from region to region. In the past, the cooperatives focused exclusively on farm management, including the personal lives of the farmers. Recent changes vary in degree from region to region, however. According to Dam's preliminary survey, for example, 12 percent of the remaining agricultural cooperatives are focusing on major stages of production and services which individual peasant households cannot perform or perform adequately: irrigation, plant protection, supply of seeds and fertilisers, and assistance in the sale of products (Dam 1995). Considering the agricultural development in the Red River Delta, it is important to know, in terms of historical background, how agricultural cooperatives have changed in the past and are now changing. Our concerns include a focus on who introduced the technical factors which caused changes both in cropping pattern and agricultural productivity on the (agricultural cooperative) village level after *Doi Moi*, and then, to evaluate the roles of cooperatives so far and consider the future roles of cooperatives or new organisations.

The Coc Thanh cooperative, Thanh Loi commune, Vu Ban district in Nam Dinh province, located at the lowest part of the Red River Delta, was chosen for the present study (fig. 1). We visited the village on a number of occasions from 1994 to 1996, interviewing the staff members of the cooperatives, and farmers as well.

## Description of the Coc Thanh cooperative

### *Setting of the Coc Thanh cooperative and its hydrographical conditions*

The Coc Thanh cooperative is about 70 km south-east of Hanoi and its located along the Dao River (the Nam Dinh River), which is the tributary of the Red River. This area, including the Coc Thanh cooperative, is surrounded by the Red River, the Dao River, the Day River and the Chau Giang River, and is known as the Nam Ha Irrigation Scheme. Total area is 85,000 ha, 80 percent of which is less than 2 m above sea level. It is one of the lowest regions in the Red River Delta (Yanagisawa *et al* 1996; Binnie *et al* 1995).



**Fig. 1** Nam Ha Irrigation Scheme and the Coc Thanh Cooperative

Large scale pumping stations were constructed between 1966 to 1972 along the main rivers, and Nam Ha no. 1 Irrigation and Drainage Management Company (*cong ty thuy nong 1 tinh Nam Ha*) was established to maintain and manage the irrigation and drainage facilities, including water ways and pumping stations. At present, this company controls the irrigation and drainage system in the region.

The Coc Thanh Pumping Station next to the Coc Thanh cooperative, is one of the large scale pumping stations, constructed in 1966. After that, because farmers in the Coc Thanh cooperative were able to irrigate in the rainy season

and drain in the spring season with a pump, the area was planted with double crops of rice totaling almost 90 percent of the cultivated land. The growing period was from January until May in the spring season and June to October in the rainy season. On the remaining 10 percent of the land, farmers could practice double cropping in the rainy season and plant groundnut in the winter-spring season.

### *Organisation of the Coc Thanh Cooperative*

The population of the Coc Thanh cooperative is 3650, its total surface area is 349 ha, and the population density is 1047 person/km<sup>2</sup> (Sakurai 1994: 1-7). The number of households is 1023, total cultivated area is 245 ha, each household averages 0.24 ha and each person has 0.07 ha of cultivated land. In the Red River Delta, which is characterised by a high population density and little land, it can be said that the Coc Thanh cooperative is a typical village.

The Coc Thanh cooperative is composed of 8 hamlets called *xom*. Each hamlet has a production brigade (*doi san xuat*). The production brigade is a lower branch of the cooperatives. It transmits, through the head of the production brigade (*doi truong*), official notices from the commune to each household and transmits requests from farmers to the cooperative or commune.

### *Topography*

The irrigation and drainage system in the Nam Ha Irrigation Scheme is, as mentioned above, operated by a pump. The system in the Coc Thanh cooperative also depends heavily on the Coc Thanh Pumping Station. The water irrigated by the pumping station, however, is distributed in each field by natural gravity. Land elevation in the cooperative is an important factor in deciding cropping pattern. According to Mr. Truong Duc Tri, an engineer of design and planning in the Nam Ha no. 1 Irrigation and Drainage Management Company, the Coc Thanh cooperative has an undulating topography in comparison with other cooperatives in the Nam Ha Irrigation Scheme, characterized by lowland plains. Fig. 2 shows the contour map of the Coc Thanh cooperative. Local farmers classify land elevation into 6 levels, in order of the height of elevation: *cao*, *van cao*, *van*, *vua phai*, *thap*, and *trung*, which means respectively: very high, high, rather high, normal, rather low, and very low lying marshy land. In this paper land elevation of the Coc Thanh cooperative is classified in the following 4 levels: (1) very high fields (more than 200 cm), (2) High fields (from 170 to 199cm), (3) normal elevation fields (from 140 to 169 cm), and (4) lower (less than 139 cm high). Table 1 shows the correspondence between the local classification and our own classification.

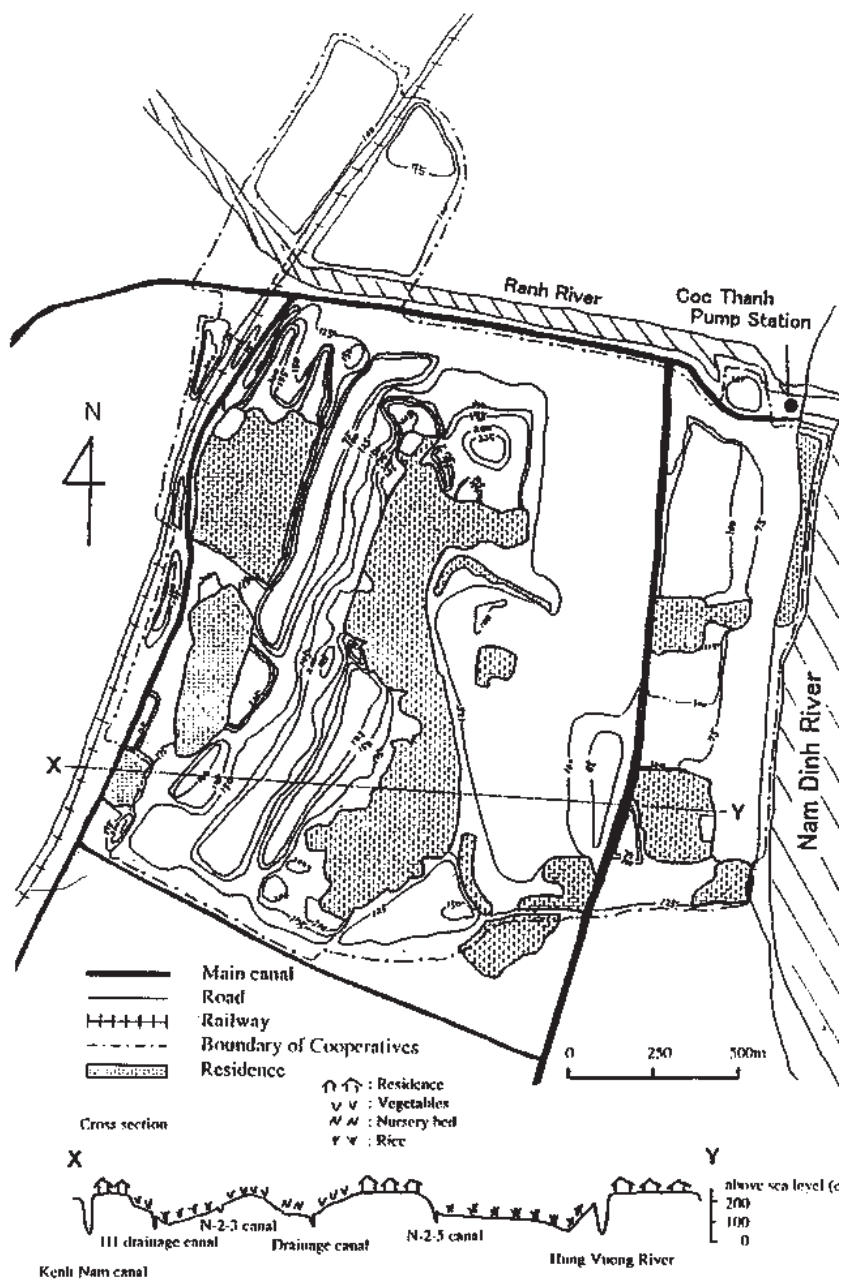


Fig. 2 Topographical map of the Coc Thanh Cooperative

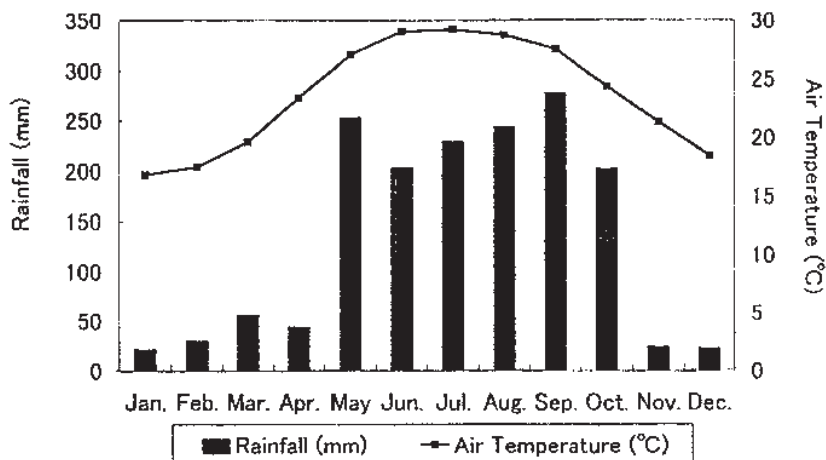
**Table 1** Land type classified by elevation

type	local classification	elevation* (cm)	area (ha)	ratio (%)
the highest	cao, van cao	more than 200	11.9	6.0
high	van	from 199 to 170	14.7	7.5
middle	vua phai	from 169 to 140	29.5	15.0
low	thap, trung	less than 139	141.0	71.5

\* above sea level

### *Climatic conditions*

Data issued by the Nam Dinh meteorological station 7 km from the Coc Thanh cooperative provided us with monthly rainfall figures and air temperatures from 1986-1995 (fig. 3). The average yearly rainfall is 1610 mm; 90 percent of this quantity of water falls from May to October. The variation between the years is large, however: from 3005 mm in 1994 to 977mm in 1988. In the rainy season of 1994, rice cultivation in many places was damaged by floods, and the Coc Thanh cooperative was not spared.

**Fig. 3** Monthly rainfall and air temperature in Nam Dinh

Source Calculated from data of Nam Dinh Meteorological station from 1985 to 1995

Air-temperature is high from May to September, and the average monthly temperature is over 27 degree centigrade (°C). In other months, it is rarely over 24°C. From December to February, it can be as cold as 5°C. If seedlings of the spring rice are exposed to an extended cold spell, they can be damaged and the harvest considerably reduced. The period from December to February is called the

season of drizzling rain (*mua phun* in Vietnamese). It can be cloudy for weeks on end, and solar radiation is generally quite low.

## Changes in cropping patterns

In this section we discuss the changes in cropping patterns between 1985 and 1996 and analyse the reasons for those changes. We chose 1985 as the year of departure for cropping patterns before *Doi Moi* for the following reasons: (1) farmers recall this year very clearly as the latest year before changes started and, (2) the availability of the land registers of those days so that the crop planted areas could be estimated (Coc Thanh cooperative 1992a, *ibid.* 1992b: *So giai thua 1984-1992; So giai thua tu 115, Mua*).

### *Cropping pattern in 1985*

Figures based on the land registers of the Coc Thanh cooperative and on field surveys clearly show the changes in cropping patterns between 1985 and 1996 (see fig. 4). After the construction of the Coc Thanh pumping station and the consolidation of land, farmers were able to plant double crops. In the rainy season (*vu mua*) of 1985, 91 percent of the cultivated area was planted with rice. In June rice was sown in the nursery beds and irrigated by the Coc Thanh pumping station, in June-July it was transplanted, and harvested in September-October.

Most fields which had not been planted with paddy were used for nursery beds. Elevated fields, with not acidic soil and situated near residence areas so they were easy to irrigate and to drain. In these (nursery bed) fields or home gardens, vegetables were planted throughout the year. In the rainy season, spice crops such as coriander (*Coriandrum sativum*) and leafy vegetables like water convolvulus (*Ipomoea aquatica*) were planted. In the winter season, potato (*Solanum tuberosum*), kohlrabi (*Brassica oleracea* variety *gongylodes*), and stem lettuce (*Lactuca sativum* variety *asparagina*). In the winter-spring season, garland chrysanthemum (*Chrysanthemum coronarium*), stem lettuce, and ceylon spinach (*Basella rubra*). Most other vegetables, however, were only planted in small areas and mainly used for home consumption.

In the winter season (*vu dong*) after the harvesting season 90 percent of the fields of agriculture were not cultivated, except for the home gardens and the higher elevation fields where vegetables were planted. As for the nursery beds fields, they were not used to grow any crops during *vu dong*. They were only used for the sowing of the seed and the pulling out of the seedlings for the winter-spring rice.

In the winter-spring season (*vu chiem*), 80 percent of the cultivated area was used for rice. The winter-spring season rice was sown in December, trans-

1985			1996		
cropping pattern <sup>(*)</sup>	cropping calendar J F M A M J J A S O N D	planted area and its change <sup>(**)</sup> (unit ; ha)	cropping pattern	cropping calendar J F M A M J J A S O N D	planted area (unit ; ha)
VEG	VEG	2.7 (2.7) →	VEG	VEG	11.9
GN-RR	GN RR	20.8 { (9.2) (11.6) →	VEG-RR	VEG RR	12.6
2R	WSR RR	151.6 { (1.0) (9.7) → (140.9) →	2R-VEG	WSR RR VEG	9.7
NB	NBRR NBWSR	14.6 (14.6) →	2R	WSR RR	140.9
2R,GN-RR	WSR,GN RR	7.7 (7.7) →	NB-2R	WSR NBWSR	14.6
(Pond)		0.1 (0.1) →	SP	PO VEG RS VEG	7.7
			2R	WSR RR	0.1

(\*) VEG: vegetables, RR: rainy season rice, GN: groundnut, 2R: double cropping of rice, WSR: winter-spring rice, NB: nursery bed, SP: production managed by the cooperatives, PO: potato, RS: rice for seed  
 (\*\*) → indicates the changes of planted areas. For example, the cropping area of vegetables (VEG) in 1996 was 11.9 ha, of which 2.7 ha was VEG and 9.2 ha was GN-RR in 1986.

**Fig. 4** Changes in the cropping pattern of the Coc Thanh Cooperative  
 Source This data is estimated from the land register of the Coc Thanh cooperative 1984-1992 and 1992 and also includes results of field surveys



planted from January until *Tet* (New Years on the lunar calendar), and harvested in May. The nursery beds were made in the very same fields as the ones where the rainy season rice was planted. The planted area was about 10 percent smaller in comparison with the area planted with the rainy season rice, because groundnut was to be planted in the higher elevation fields, as the crop requires the sandy soil of those higher fields.

Groundnut was planted in order to be able to make the compulsory payments to the government. The Coc Thanh cooperative assigned 23.9 ha of the highest and the high elevation field for groundnut production. They paid 30-40 kg/*sao* (0.83-1.1 ton/ha) of the harvest to the government.

### *Changes in the cropping patterns from 1985 to 1996*

Before 1988, farmers could not select cropping patterns by themselves. After land distribution in 1988, 1992 and 1995, all land was distributed to the farmers. Cropping patterns in the Coc Thanh cooperative underwent a big change, because farmers could choose their own land freely. Seasonal changes in cropping patterns in 1996 are noted in the following chapter.

#### *Rainy season*

In the rainy season, 87 percent of the cultivated area was planted with rice. This has not changed significantly in terms of planted area in comparison with 1985. The higher elevation fields area (the sandy soils planted with vegetables) expanded 4.4 times, from 2.7 ha in 1985 to 11.9 ha in 1996. Vegetables, like for instance Welsh onion (*Allium fistulosum*), garlic (*Allium sativum*), Chinese chive (*Allium tuberosum*), tomato (*Lycopersicon esculentum*), chili (*Capsicum annuum*) were added to the traditional spice crops planted in these fields.

Fields for nursery beds were not only used as nurseries but also as paddy fields. After the pulling of seedlings of rainy season rice, the nurseries were planted as paddy fields. Since the introduction in 1992 of early maturing varieties of glutinous rice the fields for nursery beds have been used more efficiently. We can also observe a more intensive use of the fields, in the winter-spring season.

#### *Winter season*

Although more than 90 percent of the fields of agriculture were not planted in 1985, except for home garden vegetables and higher elevation fields near the residences, more intensive land use started in 1988. In higher elevation fields the grounds where kohlrabi, Chinese radish (*Raphanus sativum*), sweet potato, potato, cos lettuce (*Lactuca sativum* variety *longifeolia*) and so on are cultivated expanded about 10 fold from 2.7 ha in 1985 to 27.6 ha in 1996. Technically speaking, the reasons why the vegetable area could expand at such a rate are: (1) the diffusion of new seedling techniques, (2) the availability of

irrigation water for the vegetables, and (3) the introduction of new crops and varieties.

*The diffusion of the young seedling planting method* ('ma nen' or 'ma san') — There is a seedling method called *ma nen* or *ma san* in Vietnamese. In this paper we call it 'the young seedling planting method (YSPM).' YSPM is a method to let seedling grow well. After spreading mud in the home garden or higher elevation fields near a residence, rice seeds are sowed. When the seedling has grown 10-15 cm in height with 2 foliage leaves during the winter-spring season, it is transplanted in the paddy field. YSPM protects higher rice nurseries against possible damage due to low-temperatures during the winter-spring seedling period. Although the method was introduced in the Coc Thanh cooperative as early as the last half of the nineteen seventies, low-temperature injury was then only being prevented by planting the early maturing varieties of rice known in those days. In fact at that time, many farmers chose not to adopt the innovative method as yet. This was to change in the second half of the nineteen eighties. In the rather elevated fields used for double rice cropping, since 1985 farmers started to practice triple cropping: rainy season rice, winter-spring rice and vegetables. Legally able to do so after Resolution 10 (1988). In the three months between the rice harvests of the rainy season and winter-spring other crops were planted: winter crops such as potato, kohlrabi and leafy vegetables. It is more profitable for farmers to have wider cultivated areas, provided they can spare the manpower and have the time and the opportunity to sell their vegetables. Shortening the rice cropping period and increasing the number of vegetable-harvests is propitious to the expansion of the vegetable planted area. This is the reason why YSPM was to diffuse so rapidly after 1988. The method has thus two distinctive advantages: its tolerance to low temperatures and the shortening of the growing period of the seedling enabling the farmers to postpone his planting of seedling for about a month. The area converted to triple cropping thanks to YSPM use, has been estimated at 10.7 ha.

*Irrigation-water supply for vegetables* — Enough water to irrigate throughout the year is needed in order to be able to expand a vegetable crop area. The Coc Thanh pumping station is responsible for irrigation and drainage within the cooperative. Having been designed in the first place to irrigate rice crops, the irrigation system soon became deficient when it had to accommodate vegetable crops too. Since the expansion of vegetable cropping the shortage of water has become more and more obvious in between the winter and spring rice tilling periods. In 1989 the Coc Thanh cooperative purchased three diesel pumps. Two pumps with a capacity of 540 m<sup>3</sup>/hr and a third one with a capacity of 320 m<sup>3</sup>/hr. As shown in fig. 5, one of the pumps was set up at a two-level crossing point of H1 drainage canal and N-2 canal. During each season irrigation from

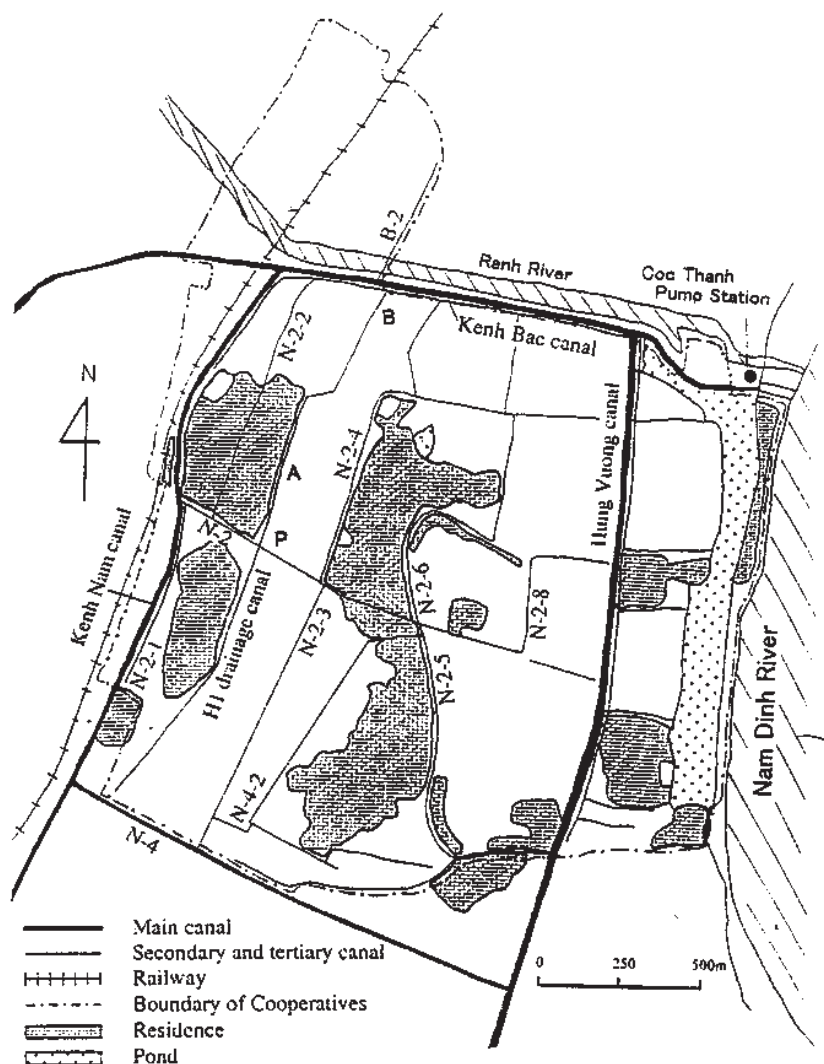


Fig. 5 Canal system of the Coc Thanh Cooperative

the H1 drainage canal to N-2 canal was carried out at least 3 to 4 times. Farmers carry the water from the canal to their own vegetable fields. The H1 drainage canal starts in a paddy field and then heads for the nurseries located south-west of the cooperative. It then goes north, turns east along the Kent Bac canal and flows into the Hung Vuong canal. Very soon the volume of water kept in the H1 canal appeared to be insufficient to irrigate both the paddy fields and the vegetable crops. The expansion of the vegetable cropping area called for a more

abundant water supply indeed. Plans were made for repair works and in 1994 the Coc Thanh cooperative had the H1 canal widened from 6 m to 8 m at A point and deepened 50 cm at B point. The cooperative developed drainage ability in the rainy season and a capacity for storing water for vegetable cultivation in the winter-spring season.<sup>4</sup>

*Introduction of new crops and varieties* — The introduction of new crops and varieties also explains the enlargement of the vegetable cultivated area. New varieties of vegetables such as garland chrysanthemum, cos lettuce (*Lactuca sativum*), stem lettuce, sweet potato, potato were introduced after 1986. Celery (*Apium graveolens*) and onion (*Allium cepa*) and other completely new crops were also introduced at that time. These highly marketable varieties gave the farmers good incentive to grow vegetables. For example, in the former days, there was only one variety of sweet potato, with a growing period of 6 months. Actually it was after the introduction of 3 month varieties, that the planted area really began to expand. In the case of potato, a new water-logging tolerant variety allowed the planted area to be expanded in low land areas. Another example is garland chrysanthemum. In 1985, *rau cai cuc ta* variety was planted in the Coc Thanh cooperative. Although its leaves are rather small, it has a gorgeous smell. Later, with the introduction of the *rau cai cuc tau* variety – big leaves but a terrible smell – the cultivated area expanded rapidly. It seems varieties with large leaves are easier to grow. It was assumed the latter variety would also be more profitable for sale. Some years later however, when many farming products were sold in the market, people seem to prefer the good smelling garland chrysanthemum to the variety with the big leaf. So, in the end, the old variety turned out to be more profitable than the new one.

#### *Winter-spring season*

In 1996 the rice planted area totalled 76 percent of the land in the winter-spring season. The ratio did not change significantly in comparison with that of 1985. The total planted area however, decreased by the year. It was 150 ha in 1996, after a peak of 183 ha in 1993. This decline was caused by the expansion of vegetable plantations. Vegetables were also planted in the fields where groundnut had been planted in 1985, because vegetable cultivation appeared to be more profitable than groundnut. The technical aspects of expanded vegetable plantation in the winter-spring season and in winter are very much alike. Yet there are some differences. There is for instance a difference in cropping patterns between winter-spring and winter planting when it comes to potato cultivation. Before 1985, the usual pattern was to plant potato from October to December (winter potato). With the assistance of Dutch agricultural engineers the spring potato was introduced into the Coc Thanh cooperative in 1986. The spring potato is planted from December to April. Spring potato, under the cooperatives' guid-

ance in cultivation methods, was planted for seed and for the export. The Coc Thanh cooperative is currently in business with the Hanoi Potato Seed Centre (*Tring Tam Khoai Tay Giong Hanoi*) and the Vietnam Agricultural Science Institute (*Vien Khoa Hoc Ky Thuat Nong Nghiep*) for the purchase of potato seeds and chemical fertilizers in order to supply the farmers. The yield of spring potato is approximately 600-700 kg/*sao* (18.3-19.4 ton/ha). The farmers pay for these seeds and fertilizers in kind – they hand over 360 kg/*sao* (10 ton/ha) of potato to the cooperative and sell the remaining harvest on the market to their own profit.

Three fields totalling 30 *mau* (10.8 ha) have been appointed by the Coc Thanh cooperative for spring potato cultivation. It can be said that these fields were substantially managed by the cooperative, although all land was formally distributed to the farmers after Resolution 10 in 1988. Because the cooperative has to pay a certain amount of potato to the Hanoi Potato Seed Centre and the Vietnam Agricultural Science Institute (about 40 ton in 1995) the farmers are not allowed to grow other crops in the winter-spring season. Throughout the year, the farmers are to follow strictly the potato cultivation methods the cooperative prescribes. Potato cultivation in the winter season, for example, was prohibited in order to avoid possible damage due to continuous cropping. Celery and leafy vegetables which used to be planted along the sides of the potato ridge in the winter-spring season until 1995 were no longer allowed to be cultivated afterwards because the cooperative feared these cultures could have negative effects on the potato quality. As long as the cultivation methods required by the cooperative were followed, the culture of spring potatoes was restricted to the appointed fields. In fact according to cooperative figures more and more farmers are involved in the spring potato production. Setting aside the cultivation in the appointed fields, in 1996 5 *mau* (1.8 ha) were used to grow spring potatoes. Spring potato production was initiated by the cooperative. And the cooperative still manages the production. It seems to be successful on the whole. This is an example of good management by a cooperative.

How could the vegetable area expand so rapidly in the Coc Thanh cooperative? The convenient location of the cooperative – 7 km from the city of Nam Dinh City as a selling area – seems to be the most obvious reason for this speedy expansion (Que, Phan & Tuan 1996). But we must mention the favourable geographical characteristics of the higher elevation fields as well. Growing several kinds of vegetables happens to be quite easy in the sandy soil of these highland fields. Another reason for the rapid expansion lies in the relentless efforts of both the cooperative and the farmers to promote vegetable cropping. The question is now, whether or not, given similar prolific conditions other cooperatives could perform as well as the Coc Thanh. Leaving the more recent varieties aside, the farmers of the Coc Thanh cooperative have been able to develop many vegetables seeds at home. When it comes to cultivation methods which include highly developed techniques like mixed cropping and precise fertilizer

applications the cooperation has a long history indeed. As this type of farming cannot be learned in a short time it seems very unlikely that other cooperatives could perform as well under similar conditions.

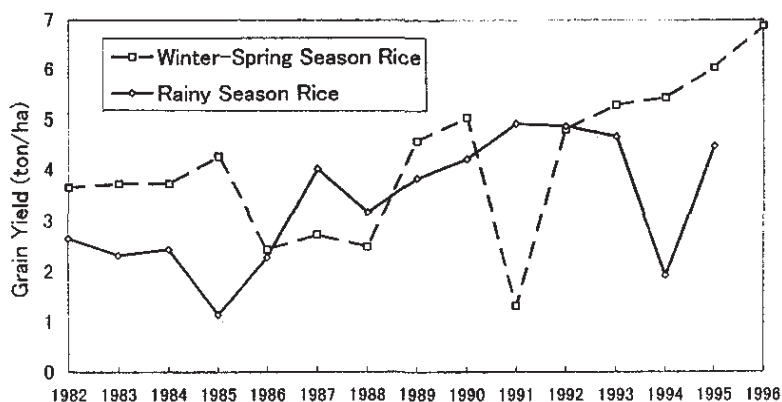
Yet, earlier, in the nineteen eighties, another case of experimental farming in the Red River Delta has been described. In addition to Government owned and allocated contracted land, farmers are allowed to use small portions of peasant owned land to their own benefit. Such portions of land are called 5 percent land. In these portions additional crops for home consumption can be grown freely – without having to hand over any harvested product to the government, that is. It seems that before Resolution 10 (1988), these farmers drew about half of their income in cash from these small portions of land (Murano 1986: 57). So, growing crops on the 5 percent land appears to be a good incentive for farmers.

The assignment of this 5 percent land for home consumption differs from cooperative to cooperative. In Coc Thanh all of the 5 percent is concentrated around the residential areas.

Is there a connection between the vegetable cultivation in the 5 percent land and the expansion of this area after the land distribution? One must realise that the farmers had already acquired some knowledge of vegetable cultivation methods while growing crops for their own households on the 5 percent lands long before 1988.

### Changes in agricultural production

In this section we are only discussing the changes in rice productivity between 1985 and 1996. Fig. 6 shows these changes from season to season in the Coc Thanh cooperative from 1982 to 1997.



**Fig. 6** Rice fields of the Coc Thanh Cooperative since 1982

Source The Coc Thanh Cooperative

*Winter-spring season*

Although the transition to privatisation is generally considered to have been a decisive factor if we try to explain the increase of agricultural productivity after Resolution 10 in 1988, we believe the increase was not caused by the incentive of privatisation alone. After all the yield of the winter-spring season was only to increase after 1993. We believe it was the combination of the introduction of new rice varieties with the privatisation which lead to the productivity increase.

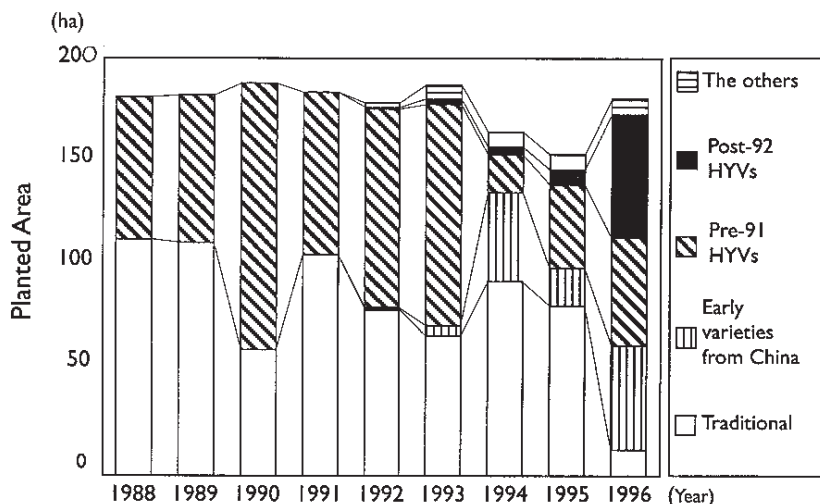
In the Coc Thanh cooperative rice varieties – both in the winter-spring and the rainy season – have become more diverse after 1992. Before 1991, there were only 2 or 3 varieties. After 1992, the number of varieties increased to 6 to 9 in the spring season and to 7 or 8 in the rainy season. In this paper, we classify these varieties into 6 groups with the following characteristics:

- 1 Traditional varieties; old varieties adopted before 1980
- 2 High yielding varieties adopted before 1991
- 3 High yielding varieties adopted after 1992
- 4 Acid-tolerant varieties; varieties countering low soil pH
- 5 Early varieties from China; early maturing varieties introduced from China
- 6 Glutinous rice and other varieties.

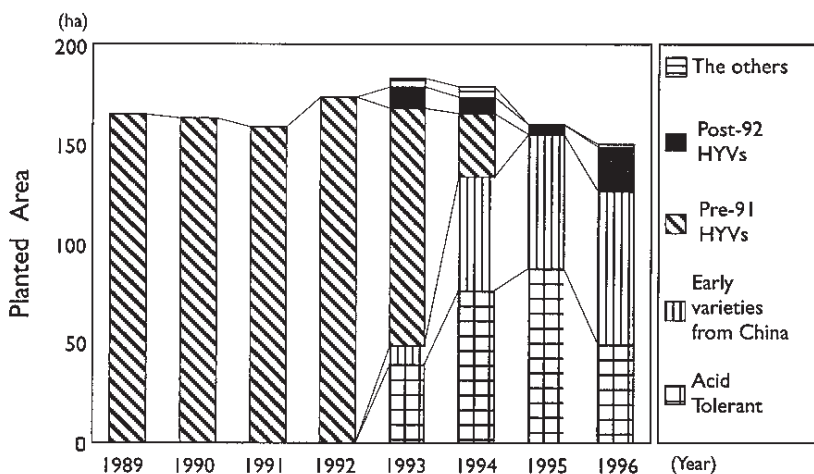
Fig. 7a and 7b show the area where different varieties of rice area planted in the Coc Thanh cooperative (see also table 2 on the role of the cooperative in the agricultural production). In the nineteen eighties there were about two or three rice varieties, which included the very widespread variety in Vietnam, the CR203. Since 1992 many more varieties have been introduced and in the winter-spring rice season all the old varieties were replaced with new ones.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 2** Role of the cooperative in the changes after *Doi Moi*

<i>changes in cropping pattern and productivity</i>	<i>supporting technologies</i>	<i>who introduced the technologies?</i>		
		<i>farmer</i>	<i>cooper atives</i>	<i>outside</i>
expansion of vegetables	young seedling method	✓		
	H1 drainage-canal		✓	
	Diesel pump		✓	
	new varieties and crops	✓	✓	✓
highly-used nursery beds	new varieties	✓	✓	✓
introduction of winter crops	introduction of maize		✓	
potato production managed by the cooperative	introduction spring potato		✓	✓
increase of ice field	new rice varieties		✓	✓
decline of traditional varieties	<i>kho am</i> method	✓		



**Fig. 7a** Rainy season



**Fig. 7b** Winter-spring season

**Fig. 7** Rice planted area by varieties in The Coc Thanh

Source The Coc Thanh Cooperative

In 1996 the low, the middle and the middle to higher fields were respectively planted with acid tolerant varieties (33 percent), post 1992 HYV's (15 percent), and early maturing varieties from China (51 percent). Acid tolerant varieties in the low fields with acidic soil, and HYV's in the middle level fields contributed to a substantial increase of the rice yield. More specifically, if we look at the yield in the low fields, we can see it was 6.2 ton/ha in 1996, which is a higher perfor-



mance than ever shown in the 1989-1991 period. It is also clear that the adoption of HYV's after 1992 lead to similar good results in the middle fields.

The early maturing varieties from China planted in the middle to higher fields have a 5 days shorter cropping period in comparison with HYV's (CR203 included) adopted before 1991 during winter-spring seasons. In addition, as mentioned above (p. 12), YSPM permits a delay in the transplanting time. The period from transplanting to harvesting of early maturing varieties from China can also be shortened by 35 to 40 days in comparison with the former varieties. Vegetable planting in this period increased the farmers' cash income. That is why the vegetable area was expanded as early maturing varieties from China expanded.

### *Rainy Season*

Rice varieties in the rainy season have also diversified since 1992. The transition to the new varieties, however, was not so rapid. The reason for this slow transition lies in the photoperiod sensitivity of a certain traditional variety, *moc tuyen*, with a stem length of 150-160 cm. Although low in efficiency compared with new varieties which are resistant to flood damage, it is widely planted in the low elevation fields, because it is tolerant to water logging. *Moc tuyen* was one of the main rainy season varieties which existed in the Coc Thanh cooperative before 1995.

In 1995, however, the planted area decreased 15 percent in comparison with 1994. Maize cultivation in the winter season and diffusion of new seedling growing methods called *kho am* account for this relative decrease. In the next paragraphs we shall discuss these two factors of decrease a little further.

*Maize cultivation in the winter season* — Since 1996 maize has been planted in the low fields of the Coc Thanh cooperative, where as we have seen earlier (p. 12) rice was also planted twice a year. In these fields, the rainy season rice was a traditional variety with a long cropping period (105 to 110 days) and was harvested in the middle of October. Maize planted after the rainy season rice harvest can only be collected in a period traditionally reserved for the preparation of the land and the planting of the winter-spring rice. This overlap explains why only early maturing varieties were planted in these fields during the rain season. Early maturing varieties are not, as we have seen, as tolerant of water logging as the traditional ones, but then, as a Coc Thanh cooperative staff member pointed out, any yield decrease would be compensated for by maize production.

*Diffusion of a new seedling method, 'kho am'* — Another reason for the decrease of the area planted with traditional varieties in the Coc Thanh cooperative is the diffusion of a new seedling method. Damage caused by low temperatures is one

of the most serious seedling problems during the winter-rice season and water logging caused by heavy rainfall is the most serious one during the rainy season. Low temperatures can be avoided by locating the nursery beds in the low fields and the main measure against water logging would be pump drainage, if we are to believe the farmers. During the seedling period water logging damage could be avoided if YSPM is practised but such damage may be unavoidable after transplanting.

In order to solve these problems, the *kho am* method was developed. It became then possible to avoid water logging injury during the seedling period through broadcasting in the middle to higher fields, and to avoid post-transplanting water logging injury by transplanting seedling only when they have reached a respectable length, when they are about 25 to 30 cm tall. Furthermore, the introduction of the *tap giao* variety, a FI variety that grows rapidly, has allowed farmers to grow large seedlings more easily. The planted area comprised 5 percent of the rice cultivated area in 1995. It was to increase to 33 percent in 1996. It particularly expanded in the low fields, where long-stem and traditional variety was previously planted to avoid water logging damage.

In comparison to the winter-spring season, the grain yield of the rainy season did not increase sharply after 1988. The main obstacle to the introduction of the new variety is the threat of water logging damage. This explains why farmers tend to stick to the traditional varieties. So far, the farmers considered pump drainage to be the only way to avoid water logging damage in the rainy season. The problem is this cannot be done at farm-level. Only the Province or the Irrigation and Drainage Management Company can decide where and when pumping is necessary. As for the farmers themselves, they were the ones who initiated and developed new seedling methods and introduced new varieties which lead to an increase the rice yield in the rainy seasons.

### **Conclusion: Role of the cooperative in the agricultural production**

In the Red River Delta the cooperatives are generally in charge of the organisation of collective farming. Before 1988, the cooperatives concerned themselves with all aspects of the farmers' lifestyle, including administrative work and farming guidance. The Coc Thanh cooperative was no exception to the rule. Cooperatives, however, have been changing since the late nineteen nineties. In the case of the Coc Thanh cooperative, the number of the executive staff members decreased from 50 in 1985 to 22 in 1992. Not only is their number decreasing, their involvement in the activities of the cooperative has become smaller lately. They no longer intervene as much in the farmers' private lives, and do not guide farmers' farming practices as they used to do. In the case of rice cultivation the staff only concerned itself with cooperative bound farming activities

(cropping patterns, productivity control) and the coordination of irrigation and drainage.

The reasons for this shift of interference are both of a logical and a technical nature. As we have seen earlier, the cooperative has played a key role in the improvement of crop growing technologies. We have established earlier that innovations in the potato cultivation for seed and export turned out to be very successful. Coc Thanh has become famous in the Nam Dinh province for its spring potato production. Many other cooperatives pay Coc Thanh frequent visits in order to admire the potato fields. The executive staff of Coc Thanh then understood it would be lucrative to sell seed potatoes to other cooperatives. So they visited other cooperatives, gave them advice as how to improve their cultivation methods, seizing these opportunities to promote the sale of the Coc Thanh seed potatoes. It seems the executives of the staff disengaged themselves from the more private affairs of the farmers of the Coc Thanh cooperative in order to be able to spend more time on marketing activities.

This shift of activities doesn't alter the fact that cooperatives remain the only intermediary organisations between the commune (*Xa*) and farmers. The commune instructions and communications reach the farmers through the cooperative. This in between position enables the cooperatives to continue to play key roles. Post-privatisation conflicts between the farmers continue to be resolved through the agency of the cooperative. As long as no alternative organisations come about to mediate between the communes and the farmers and as long as the latter haven't found a way to launch their own marketing activities, the cooperatives will continue to play an important role in a general way and the role of the staff members as agents of marketing and sales is likely to expand even further.

## Notes

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- 2 Yasuyuki Kono, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 46, Shimoadachi-cho, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto 606-01, Japan.
- 3 Luat Dat Dai means land law 1995.
- 4 Besides planting vegetables in the higher elevation fields, other cropping patterns changed too. In fields planted with double crops of rice in lowland areas since 1996 maize was also planted in the winter season. Cooperatives purchased maize seeds in bulk and sold them to the farmers. They also coached the farmers in their maize cultivation by recommending the use of chemical fertilizers for instance. And from then on farmers were allowed to take part in the maize production and to deal freely in harvested maize. In July 1997 the cooperatives estimated the area to be planted with maize to be 132 *mau* (47.5 ha).
- 5 Rice varieties, were planted in 1992, which included 3 new varieties.

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# The Vietnamese transition

## A glimpse at the reality of a State Farm and some theoretical consequences

INGRID SCHRANER

There has been considerable discussion about whether the Vietnamese economic transition process could best be described as a big bang or as a gradualist approach, and whether it was a government program or a historical process. The present author considers 'From Plan to Market. The Economic Transition in Vietnam' by Adam Fforde and Stephan deVylder (1996) to be one of the most insightful Western descriptions of the process itself and a comprehensive overview of the discussion about the economic transition process. But I disagree with some of their underlying assumptions and would therefore weight certain aspects differently. I most particularly disagree with three aspects of their historical view:

- 1 Their distinction between a neo-Stalinist formula as a static origin of Vietnamese economic policies on the one hand, and adaptations to the Vietnamese reality on the other.
- 2 Their distinction between what they call a DRV program<sup>1</sup> based on the above two elements, and a DRV model which consists basically of those aspects of the DRV program which the Vietnamese government was able to implement.
- 3 Their assumption that in 1975 the experience with central planning available to the Vietnamese policy makers was limited to the experiences made in North Vietnam between 1954 and 1975.

This paper proposes to look at the Vietnamese economic transition in conjunction with both the theoretical discussions held at the time as well as the practical reform experience of other socialist countries.<sup>2</sup> It will outline them as strands within the socialist discourse itself to which the different sections within the Vietnamese government could refer in order to justify their own approach to different economic policies. The reference to practical reform experiences and theoretical frameworks discussed in other socialist countries allows a review of the effects which specific Vietnamese policy measures had on a particular state-owned enterprise, namely the 'Farm for dairy cows' in Moc Chau. This calls for a different view of the Vietnamese economic transition as a historical process.

### Theoretical reform discussions accessible to the Vietnamese at the time

The early nineteen sixties were a time of intense theoretical debate in almost all socialist countries. It was the time when the Industrialisation Debate which had taken place in the Soviet Union in the nineteen twenties – before Stalin – was taken up again; the time when Liberman published his famous Pravda article; the time of the 23rd Party Congress of the CPSU; and last but not least the time when intense theoretical discussions over several years preceded the economic reforms known as the Prague Spring.<sup>3, 4, 5</sup> Most of this debate focused on ways to increase both effectiveness and efficiency of the economic mechanisms. The question whether the priority of the goal of rapid rural industrialisation itself was appropriate made part of the Industrialisation Debate.

This section presents three key topics: the function of prices regarding resource allocation in market and planned economies, the relationship between prices and planning in conjunction with management methods, and the link between planning mechanism and production efficiency.

#### *Prices and resource allocation in the nineteen thirties according to Lange*

Lange begins his description of the debate with extensive thanks to Professor Von Mises who ‘forced the socialists to recognize the importance of an adequate system of economic accounting to guide the allocation of resources in a socialist economy’ (Lange 1938: 57).<sup>6</sup> He refers to Pareto’s *Cours d’économie politique* published in 1897 and the further elaboration by Barone in 1908 as the two writings which basically contain the solution to the problem as posed by Von Mises: ‘Professor Von Mises’ contention that a socialist economy cannot solve the problem of rational allocation of its resources is based on a confusion concerning the nature of prices’ (Lange 1938: 59).<sup>7, 8</sup> Lange stresses that the term ‘price’ can have two meanings, firstly the exchange ratio of two goods in a market and secondly the generalized meaning of terms on which alternatives are offered. Only prices in the general sense of the word are necessary to solve the problem of resource allocation:

The economic problem is a problem of *choice* between alternatives. To solve the problem three data are needed: (1) a preference scale which guides the acts of choice; (2) knowledge of the ‘terms on which alternatives are offered’; and (3) knowledge of the amount of resources available (Lange 1938: 60, italic in the original).

Data for (1) and (3) are given in a socialist economy as well as in a capitalist one. Von Mises denies that data under (2) are accessible to the administrators of a socialist economy. Lange shows how Von Mises argues that the economic principles of choice between different alternatives are applicable only to the special

institutional set-up which recognizes private ownership of means of production, and that this institutional set-up is indispensable for a rational allocation of resources. Ultimately, this argument leaves Von Mises, who had stated earlier the universal validity of economic theory, vulnerable to be attacked as an institutionalist (Von Mises 1933: 27-28). Robbins and Hayek argue differently. Both admit that a rational allocation of resources in a socialist economy is *theoretically* possible as it doesn't pose a logical contradiction. They question that the problem could be *practically* solved by a method of trial and error as it is done in the capitalist economy (Robbins 1934; Hayek, *Collectivist Economic Planning*, 1935).

Lange (1938: 63-64) shows that Barone had already stressed in 1908 the fact that equations of economic equilibrium have to be solved by trial and error, in a socialist as well as in a capitalist economy, and that Taylor in a paper first published in 1929 has indicated the method of how to achieve this.<sup>9, 10</sup>

Lange demonstrates that in a competitive market it is the parametric function of prices which equalizes demand and supply of each commodity and thus satisfies the objective equilibrium condition.

On a competitive market the parametric function of prices results from the number of competing individuals being too large to enable any one to influence prices by his own action. In a socialist economy, production and ownership of the productive resources outside of labor being centralized, the managers certainly can and do influence prices by their decisions. Therefore, the parametric function of prices must be imposed on them by the Central Planning Board as an *accounting rule*. All accounting has to be done *as if* prices were independent of the decisions taken (Lange 1938: 80f, italics in the original).

Once the parametric function of prices is retained in a socialist economy, resources can be allocated by trial and error in the same way as Pareto has described for a competitive market. The perspective of plant managers is then the same in both cases, namely to minimize costs and to sell at a price which is higher than costs. But the socialist economy is able to take externalities into conscious consideration. And the income distribution can be established consciously as it is no more determined by the ownership of means of production. This allows the same demand prices to represent the same urgency of need, and a labor allocation where the marginal physical product of labor is equal to the marginal disutility of pursuing it. Lange thus shows that the function of markets, namely to provide a method of allocating resources by trial and error, can be performed also without an actual market for means of production. And he adds:

The question does not present any special theoretical difficulty if a sector of small-scale private enterprise and private ownership of the means of production is embodied in the socialist economy (Lange 1938: 121).<sup>11</sup>

*Prices and planning in the nineteen sixties according to Novozhilov*

In his article entitled 'Problems of Planned Pricing and the Reform of Industrial Management', Novozhilov insists that the 'reform of industrial management represents a reconstruction not only of the organs but also of the *methods* of management' (Novozhilov 1972: 378). Referring to the resolutions of the Plenum of the Central Committee of CPSU published in *Pravda*, 30 September 1965, he states that 'it is easy to extend the rights of the enterprise. It is difficult however, as a result of this extension to reconcile the interests of the enterprise employees with those of the economy' (*ibid.*). A system of managing a socialist economy:

develops on the basis of the optimization of planning and price setting, economic accounting, and distribution according to work done. ... At the present moment the planning of prices is the main bottleneck in the organization of the socialist economy (Novozhilov 1972: 378-79).

Until the 1965 reforms in the Soviet Union, prices were based on the assumption of the free use of material resources, and therefore prices didn't convey information as to how productive funds, working assets or natural wealth were to be employed and about what the minimum level of profitability would be for their utilization. But in reality:

Price is always derived from value but only under certain historical conditions are these derivatives equal to value. The value of a commodity unit is determined by the average socially necessary labor expenditure, while *price* is determined by *incremental* (marginal) expenditure of socially necessary labor. Price reflects the *increment* in the expenditure of social labor necessary for an increase in production of the given commodity. This is because under decentralized decision making on the production of each commodity it is not the whole production of each commodity but its relatively small growth which is under consideration. When deciding the economic practicality of increasing production of any commodity it is necessary to ascertain not the average total of expenditure per unit of commodity but the marginal magnitude, i.e. expenditure on a relatively small increase in production (Novozhilov 1972: 385).

The question discussed here, namely whether industrial-average or marginal costs should be used as the basis for planning prices, is of outmost practical importance:

The real cost of goods does not depend on prices but on the level of costs. For society as a whole commodities cannot become cheaper through decreeing low prices if these prices will lead to tremendous miscalculations – and therefore to unnecessary expenditure. On the contrary, nominal cheapness will become expensiveness (Novozhilov 1972: 386).



Another practical consequence outlined by Novozhilov:

Payment for the use of productive and circulating capital assumes the inclusion of profit in plan prices in some relation to capital investment and productive capital and not in proportion to cost (Novozhilov 1972: 386).

Using marginal analysis Novozhilov shows the need for auxiliary multipliers (Lagrange, Kantorovich) which permit:

conformity of profitability with national economic effectiveness, and between cost accounting and the optimal plan. In cost accounting they take the form of payment for productive and circulating capital, capital investment and natural resources (Novozhilov 1972: 389).<sup>12</sup>

In his conclusions Novozhilov refers to the transformation of industrial management which was initiated by the September Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU (1965) and its 23rd Congress, and states that the 'price system which was formed in the era of rigid centralization is not compatible with the expansion of enterprise rights' (Novozhilov 1972: 395), an expansion which was advocated in the resolution of the September Plenum:

The introduction of payment for the use of productive funds, circulating capital and capital investment decided in practice a number of arguments. ... The most difficult task, however, is in front of us: methods of price formation have to be evolved which would supply a sufficiently close connection between plan prices and the production plan of each commodity.

In our opinion the solution is to be sought in the development of the system advanced by the late Nemchinov (1965) and correctly called the economic accounting (*Khozvashchyomy*) system of planning (Novozhilov 1972: 396).

### *Planning mechanism and production efficiency in the nineteen sixties according to Liberman*

Liberman's article in Pravda, 9 September 1962 states the task at the beginning:

It is necessary to find a sufficiently simple and at the same time well-grounded solution to one of the most important problems set forth in the Party Program: the formation of a system for planning and assessing the work of enterprises so that they have a vital interest in higher plan assignments, in the introduction of new technology and in improving the quality of output – in a word, in achieving the greatest production efficiency (Liberman 1972: 309).

In order to get the enterprises more interested in higher plan assignments and to stimulate them to improve their output quality Liberman suggests only plans regarding output volumes and delivery schedules should be given to the enter-

prises. The detailed plan is to be compiled by the enterprise itself including labor productivity, the number of workers, wages, production costs, accumulations, capital investments and new technology to be applied.

Planning norms of profitability are to be worked out for each branch of industry and they are to be firmly established for an extended period. These norms should be confirmed by scales which fix incentive payments to the collectives whereby profit is calculated as a percentage of the productive capital. In this way a higher planned profitability works as a higher incentive which provides a powerful stimulus to increase productivity. If the plan is overfulfilled the incentive scale provides a rate midway between the planned and the actual profitability. The State income increases relatively much faster and public wealth increases while working as an insurance against extremely high deductions by enterprises and against dangers to the budget revenues.

Such a mechanism allows for a radical simplification and improvement of low level planning while centralized planning concentrates on basic levels.

This introduction to some of the theoretical issues discussed in the nineteen sixties is far from comprehensive. The context as to how these issues evolved is left out in most of the studies. The objective of the presentation of those very issues here, is to give a flavor of the discussions to which the Vietnamese economists and policy makers were exposed, and which provided a backdrop against which the Vietnamese decisions taken at the time have to be seen. The discussions of course went on, and many of the issues touched upon here were developed further, as did their opponents' arguments.

### Practical reform experience accessible to the Vietnamese at the time

This part concentrates on the experience of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). I am treating the GDR experience extensively for two reasons. Firstly, a great percentage of the foreign trained economists in Vietnam had received their training in the GDR and they closely observed the developments and changes in GDR policies and discussed them with interest. Not the least indicator of this is the availability of German documents from the time in the library of the Central Institute of Economic Management in Hanoi. Many of these documents seem to be no longer accessible in Germany, at least not from Australia. I was referred to these documents when asking for background information on the Vietnamese economic mechanisms of the time.<sup>13</sup>

The second reason is the fact that in the decade before the 'turning point' (*Wende*) in 1989 numerous new laws on combine formation and refinements of the planning regulations were introduced in the GDR. Bryson and Melzer (1991) outline interesting similarities between the regulatory blueprints of the GDR's 'plan improving' or 'plan perfecting' (*Planvervollkommnung*) and the Soviet

Union's *perestroika*, as well as the expected differences. And they conclude that 'one almost gets the impression that the Soviet reality lagged even further behind the *perestroika* rhetoric than did the GDR economy, which was so strongly criticized for refusing to adopt *perestroika* (Bryson & Melzer 1991: 4).

In addition, it is noteworthy that the changes to the economic system of the GDR were perceived by the population as attempts to improve the system rather than as reforms, a perception which corresponds to the way in which early changes to the Vietnamese economy were perceived. But this should not at all suggest that Vietnamese economic policies were a mere mirror of the ones pursued in the GDR.

### *'Plan Perfecting' in the early nineteen eighties*

As early as 1963 East Germany introduced its 'New Economic System' which made it the first East European country to introduce reforms in the nineteen sixties. The nineteen seventies brought a re-centralization, two energy crises and declining international terms of trade.<sup>14</sup> This called for a new economic strategy for the nineteen eighties focussing on labor-saving production methods and on savings of energy, materials and capital.

#### *The 'Kombinat Reform'*

The *Kombinat Reform* (1979-1982) was a re-organization of the GDR economy based upon industrial combines (*Kombinate*) which Bryson and Melzer describe as 'vertically and horizontally integrated groups of enterprises' (Bryson & Melzer 1991: 30) created in the hope for advantages such as 'an acceleration of scientific and technical progress, improved supply conditions, more efficient use of machinery, lower production costs and improvement of product assortments and quality through appropriate innovation' (*ibid.*).<sup>15</sup> The combines were established with the intention:

that the combines would rationalize production, create larger production units with better internal organization, reduce interbranch and intersectoral coordination problems for the ministries, and initiate more flexible planning and more effective decision-making processes (Bryson & Melzer 1991: 30).

The Director General of a *Kombinat* could reassign production capacities and leadership roles in all enterprises of the combine. He or she was at the same time director of the combine and manager of the 'parent enterprise' (*Stamm-betrieb*) and had therefore the double function of a ministerial agent and of an entrepreneur.

### *The Director General*

was enjoined to introduce new technologies, to penetrate new markets, and to achieve 'intensification' (to increase production through improved technologies and increased labor productivity rather than through the utilization of more extensive volumes of labor and capital) (Bryson & Melzer 1991: 30-31).

### *The 'perfecting' of direct and indirect steering*

The 'perfecting' of direct and indirect steering in 1982-83 refers to the introduction of a large number of new planning directives, improved management techniques and planning coefficients in order to intensify production via greater precision in central planning and strengthening of cost-benefit thinking on the part of managers. Greater productivity and cost discipline was sought by evaluating enterprises and combines based on profitability.<sup>16</sup> Out of about 90 planning indicators adopted in 1984 four were considered really significant: net production, net profit, products and services for the population, and exports. They were to replace the output measure of industrial commodity production.

A further development in the balancing of raw materials and semi-finished products led to the generation of 2136 balances by the central planning organs which determined 76 percent of industrial inputs. A further 2400 balances were to be drawn up by the combines themselves (Bryson & Melzer 1991: 31-32). Indirect steering was to be enhanced by making net revenues the criterion for rational resource utilization and by altering the levies influencing net profit such as the production fund levy, the net profit deduction, and regulations for the formation and use of enterprise funds.

Another innovation was the 'contribution to social funds' (*Beitrag für gesellschaftliche Fonds*). A payroll tax of 70 percent of the total wage fund was meant to force enterprises to economize labor. Pricing was altered to reward innovations and new products. The rights of institutions monitoring the performance of producers were extended and some new institutions like the State Balancing Inspection and the Inspections for Quality were created. This led to a considerable reduction in energy and material consumption in the first half of the nineteen eighties and to a more efficient use of labor and capital. But in general the indirect steering mechanism emphasized negative incentives and undervalued positive ones.

### *'All-encompassing intensification'*

'All-encompassing intensification' (*umfassende Intensivierung*) comprises the concepts of 'substantially upgraded production' (*Veredelungskonzeption*), 'efficiency planning', 'key technologies', and the revaluation of all fixed assets.<sup>17</sup> It formed the basis for the 'planning order' 1986-90 (*Ordnung der Planung*).<sup>18</sup>

'All-encompassing intensification' refers to 'the complex, balanced use of intensive growth factors to achieve the greatest possible effect' (Bryson & Melzer 1991: 33).<sup>19</sup> With regard to the planning order 1986-90 Bryson & Melzer conclude:

The contractual aspect of these regulations is significant because when individual combines and enterprises can make their own arrangements in research and production, they are achieving the 'self-management' that is such an essential part of the general reform concepts currently prevalent in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. As is apparent in the East German case, this arrangement is taken for granted (Bryson & Melzer 1991: 36-37).

The changes introduced under the planning order 1986-1990 were in contradiction to the decentralization aspect of self-management. They contained a rapid growth of plan indicators, in particular 55 plan indicators for microelectronic, CAD/CAM and computer technologies. Performance standards were introduced to enhance intensive growth but incentive incompatibilities led to poor performance. Better planning coordination was aimed at by the use of 5 types of balances: energy use; materials and other inputs; equipment; consumer goods; and industrial plants in preparation.

Two other factors of the planning order have to be taken into account. Computerization allowed the performance of combines to be analyzed by the center immediately and actions to overcome potential problems could be initiated quickly. There were attempts for structural changes in production as the scarcity of inputs required a refining of the system of allocation and of the monitoring of the resources used. But by 1989 plan consistency had not been achieved, and the refinements in balancing had led to a clearer understanding of specific input shortages, but not to their overcoming. Guenter Mittag consequently 'insisted that combines should develop the ability to produce their own quality inputs' (Bryson & Melzer 1991: 40) which ultimately would refer to a rejection of division of labor in industry and would reduce the coefficients of an input-output table of the economy to zero – hardly a viable solution to the problem.

### *The experimental combines*

In late 1986 the principle of enterprise 'internal resource generation' (*Eigengewirtschaftung der Mittel*) had been introduced which required the production units to cover current expenditures from their own revenues, and investments from profit, depreciation allowances and interest bearing credits. These changes were a consequence of the interest in strengthening the economic independence of the individual enterprise within the combines and to create self-management at the enterprise level in order to overcome some weaknesses of the centralized character of the combine system, namely immense disproportions between centrally and regionally directed combines, big differences in

performance levels between combines and significant problems within combines.

The new ideas included a new investment fund to be covered 40 percent from amortization and 60 percent from retained earnings. This enterprise investment fund could not be accessed by the Director General of the combine although he had to approve the investment projects. In 1988 some new incentives were introduced in the experimental combines. These incentives provided the production units with discretionary use of incremental profits. It was hoped that the freedom of enterprises could be increased in some investment decisions while retaining the advantages of planning certain industrial structures.

Bryson and Melzer mention the following important measures:

- In connection with a planned reduction in the number of centrally directed investment projects, some discussion was devoted to reducing the number of plan indicators.
- The production units were allowed to keep a greater share of earned profits.
- There was a plan to keep some norms in effect for more than a single year; a certain part of extra profit might be saved, for example, for use in a future period.
- On an experimental basis, the production fund levy was to be financed out of costs rather than from profits.
- Production units were permitted to retain a certain and increasing share of foreign currency earnings. These were to be used to import technologies and spare parts.
- The fund for science and technology was no longer to be financed out of costs, but out of profit in order to encourage the combines and enterprises to save funds used for R&D.
- General repairs were to be financed from amortization funds rather than being seen as 'costs' to be financed from the repairs fund, taking into account that general repairs increase the value and the life of capital goods.
- To better motivate the labor force, consideration was given to relating the wage fund to labor productivity (Bryson & Melzer 1991: 44).

In 1988 there were 16 experimental combines. A plan existed to increase them to 52 industrial and construction combines in 1989 and to increase their number even more in 1990 to allow the next Five Year Plan to include improvements for the whole economy. But there was also the view that although greater room for maneuvering should be given to production agents, the situation was to be carefully monitored and then hedged around with new regulations. There was a clear tendency to over-manage the activities of production agents.

## **The farm for dairy cows in Moc Chau – The perspective of a Vietnamese state-owned enterprise in agriculture**

### *Historical background and organizational structure*

Moc Chau is a fertile plateau at about 960 meters above sea level in Vietnam's North West, on the way to Dien Bien Phu, about 190 km from Hanoi. After the end of the war against the French the Vietnamese Regiment 280 of Division 335 was stationed there with some 1600 men and the task to clear the fertile grounds of the highlands of Moc Chau. On the 8 April 1958 the farm was formally founded as a State Farm under the Department for Military Agriculture of the Ministry of Defense. During the war against the USA it was transferred to the Ministry for State Farms. Organisation of production still followed the military patterns with seven brigades with a bookkeeper each, and the Farm's bookkeeping evolved from the military system into the Vietnamese form of central planning. Cuban support and Cuban cows characterize the time after the daily bombings when from 1973 onwards a large scale dairy operation was being established. In the absence of scarcity prices the main task was to build up the nation's dairy herd on the basis of the availability of the necessary inputs which were allocated according to plan, a task which was successfully completed based on stall-feeding with fodder concentrate, high fertilizer and pesticide inputs, and high stocking rates. During this period the farm showed good production figures and provided work for an increasing number of families. In 1985 the Ministry of Agriculture established an enterprise combine which comprised dairy cows, tea, fodder production, electricity production and mechanics as well as its own hospital. As can be seen from the enterprises forming the combine there were a number of State institutions involved, like the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Domestic Trade, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Trade, the Ministry of Light Industry and the Ministry of Health, as well as their respective departments dealing with State Farms.

Administrative reforms in 1987 led to the dissolution of the enterprise combine, a change which must have met considerable local resistance. This led eventually to the establishment of the 'Farm for dairy cows' in Moc Chau as a basic economic institution with independent bookkeeping, its own seal and the right to open its own bank account under its old name Moc Chau State Farm no. 1.<sup>20</sup> The administrative reform of 1987 led to the formation of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry (MAFI) from three ministries: the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Foodstuff and the Ministry for Food Processing.<sup>21, 22, 23</sup> According to a senior official of the by now Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development MARD, the rationale behind this reorganization was an integration from seed production to preserving/processing and marketing – which meant in 1987 selling at fixed prices to the Ministry of Trade, which had just been formed

from the former Ministry for Domestic Trade and the former Ministry of Foreign Trade.<sup>24</sup>

The administration or management of the State's property was entrusted to companies or general companies.<sup>25</sup> In 1988 the newly established MAFI reorganized its General Department for Livestock and created, amongst others, the organizations which came to be known in English as the Animal Feed and Production Company Number 1 and 2, for the North and the South respectively. I will use the capital spelling 'Company' as a shorthand to refer the Northern one which is responsible for Moc Chau Dairy Farm.<sup>26</sup> In 1989 the farm distributed 106 cows to 20 trial families to find out whether a system of smallholder family farmers could be established in order to overcome the poor health and nutritional status of the cow herd. The results of the trial were encouraging and by mid 1991 some 180 smallholders had received a total of about 1500 head of dairy cattle on credit, together with about 650 ha land.

### *State owned enterprises (SOEs) as addressees of State policies*

#### *Different administrative levels*

The historical and organizational context of the Farm for Dairy Cows in Moc Chau already shows how important it is to clearly identify the administrative level of a SOE concerned, and the time under discussion. The enterprise combine established in 1985 was called *Kombinat* or combine by all local officials we spoke with, but so was the Company which was established in 1988 – obviously two totally different kinds of SOE with different functions in the national economy.<sup>27</sup>

In view of the above discussion it becomes clear that it can be very misleading to use the term SOE and to implicitly assume a Western definition of enterprise. In Vietnam the addressee of State policies towards SOEs can be either the Company or the farm or, previously, the combine in Moc Chau. In addition, the question of ownership and control is not only unclear to outsiders, it is also being negotiated and subject to change over time.

Similarly, the role of the Director General of the Company shows many features of the Director General of a *Kombinat* who is at the same time a ministerial official and an entrepreneur. The director of the farm on the other hand has to deal with the authorities in the ministry as well as the ones in the Company and to a certain degree fulfills a similar double role.

#### *'Perfecting' of direct and indirect steering*

A decentralization in order to strengthen central control like the one under 'Perfecting' of Direct and Indirect Steering in the GDR could also be seen in some of the developments in Vietnam. The head of the fodder mill within the farm for example showed us his plans for several years in the mid nineteen



eighties which were based on a very detailed system of planning indicators. The production fund levy though was never implemented in Vietnam.<sup>28</sup>

### *All-encompassing intensification*

The all-encompassing intensification included a revaluation of all fixed assets in the GDR. A similar exercise took place in Moc Chau on 1 July 1992 when the amounts for which the cows had been handed out to families on credit were increased – to a Western observer a unilateral change of a previously entered contract and as such incomprehensible. In the context of Vietnamese attempts to apply economic measures which have proven successful elsewhere however, the rationale of the Vietnamese government becomes intelligible, notwithstanding the fact that the consequences for some family farmers were disastrous.

The principle of ‘internal resource generation’ and the related strengthening of the economic independence of individual enterprises within a combine conflicted immediately with the power of the Director General of a Company in Vietnam, particularly as most of the new regulations kept the provision that investment projects had to be approved by the next higher level.

The ‘Farm for dairy cows’ in Moc Chau was used in the late nineteen eighties and early nineteen nineties as a pilot to test the introduction of family farming in the framework of State Farms. The parallels to the experimental combines in the GDR in 1988 are quite obvious – as are the differences.

### *The Vietnamese economic transition as a historical process – a different view*

If one follows Fforde and deVylder (1996), markets and the social and economic structure they produce seem to be inevitable. But such an idolizing of market outcomes also means an idolizing of the particular social and economic structure which has historically developed – and which is different from the ideal of a perfectly competitive market, from a so called ‘free market’. Particularly in the light of Lange’s discussion of the role of prices and markets for resource allocation in a market economy and in a planned economy, the experiences made in Moc Chau call for some comments in this context.

Agriculture is often used as a textbook example for a free market in the sense that there are many producers of an identical good, wheat of a certain quality for example. This is not wrong, but the textbooks ‘forget’ to mention, that in most cases agricultural products are being processed, and that one processing plant processes the produce of many farmers. There are thus many farmers competing with each other, none of them big enough to influence the price by a variation of quantity sold – but there are only one or a few buyers. They have a much bigger market power, particularly in view of the fact that most agricultural products are processed exactly *because* they are perishable, *because* the farmer can’t wait with the sale of the raw product until the prices rise again.

Whereas strawberry jam or polished rice – or processed, pasteurized milk, sweetened condensed milk or butter – can be stored over a longer period thus adjusting to demand patterns.

Even if the family farmers in Moc Chau were formally totally independent of the processing plant, they would still depend on the dairy in order to sell their milk. If the dairy reduces the purchasing price there is little the farmers can do, except for the few who live close to the road and can sell fresh milk in a little coffee shop. Interviews conducted in 1995 showed this difference in wealth very clearly. Given the fact that free competition exists only on one side of the market, among the sellers, but not among the buyers, it is unreasonable to expect the ‘free market’ to provide a useful function in allocating resources.

In this context the presentation of the historical process of transition assumes a particular function: *if* it can be shown that a ‘free market’ forces its way with the strength of a law of nature, *if* it is true that government and party are forced to simply cede more and more ground to markets, *then* it is best to accept markets and the social organization they produce unquestioned. *But if* it can be shown that more historical events can be explained in more detail with a less antagonistic approach, *then* the way is clear to appreciate the useful functions of markets where appropriate, and to develop alternatives in situations where markets are unable to provide a useful tool for resource allocation and for establishing social and economic relations. In particular, it becomes possible to sharpen the view for so called externalities, benefits and costs to the community which markets cannot account for.

Fforde and deVylder describe how the amount of privately owned means of production leads to a considerable inequality in income distribution:

(...) by 1989-1990 rural incomes on average had definitely improved (...) The other side of the coin of this pattern of development was, however, the emergence (perhaps to view, rather than to existence) of a group of richer farmers with substantial savings and a smaller group of poorer farmers who were net dissavers (...) The poorest groups, making up 65 percent of the population, were net dissavers. The richest group, with 15-20 percent of the population, were net savers. *This suggests that over one-half of the rural population was likely to be losing control over assets* (Fforde & deVylder 1996: 189, italic in the original, figures omitted).

Again, if one wants to hold on to an antagonistic view of a conflict in which government and party lose against a ‘free market’ which forces its way, then one can only state the described process as something inevitable. Insofar as Fforde and deVylder’s presentation of the historical process of the Vietnamese economic transition contributes to such a view, it has an idolizing function preventing a deeper analysis of Vietnamese ways to make use of theoretical debates of and practical experiences with the combination of plan and market.

Presenting the Vietnamese transition as a historical process in this context allows to go a step further and to research who was arguing how and in whose favor, which policies were implemented when, by whom and in whose interest.

## Notes

- 1 DRV being the abbreviation for the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, established on 2 September 1945 and since the country's division at the 17th parallel in 1954 covering only the country's North.
- 2 Dang Phong (1995) describes the Vietnamese years of evacuation (nineteen sixties) when the members of the Economics Institute were discussing the works of Lange, Sik and Sun Ye Fang.
- 3 See for example Spulber (1964) and *Foundations* (1964) or Erlich (1967) but also Dobb (1948).
- 4 Liberman 1972.
- 5 Kosygin 1972.
- 6 Von Mises 1937.
- 7 Pareto 1897 (vol. II): 364ff.
- 8 Barone 1935.
- 9 Barone 1935: 286-89.
- 10 Taylor 1938.
- 11 However, on grounds which result from our previous discussion of the problem, this sector should satisfy the following three conditions: (1) free competition must reign in it; (2) the amount of means of production owned by a private producer (or of the capital owned by a private shareholder in socialized industries) must not be so large as to cause a considerable inequality in the distribution of incomes; (3) the small-scale production must not be, in the long run, more expensive than large-scale production (Lange 1938: 121).
- 12 Kantorovich 1965.
- 13 While working in Vietnam I heard repeatedly about a group of economic advisors from the GDR led by a 'Mr Muller'; Beresford and Fforde refer to the same group in the context of a discussion of productionism and distributionism: 'An influential technical assistance mission was led by a DDR minister called Muller and worked in Vietnam during the early nineteen seventies. Its Vietnamese counterpart was the Committee to Reform Economic Management (which later became CIEM). The sorts of issues focussed on were the scientific organisation and management of production and coordination of steps in the production. The Vietnamese themselves tended to focus on technical capabilities, education and moral fibre of enterprise managers and cadres' (Beresford & Fforde 1996: 28, footnote 30).
- 14 For a detailed discussion see Jeffries & Melzer 1987.
- 15 For a more detailed discussion see Bryson & Melzer 1987.
- 16 For details see Melzer 1987.
- 17 It is interesting to note that Bryson and Melzer do not mention any English reference in this context.
- 18 For more details see Troeder 1987.

- 19 See also Heinrichs 1984.
- 20 Decree 25NN-TCCB/QĐ dated 22 January 1987 also established Moc Chau State Farm no. 2 (tea production), Moc Chau State Farm no. 3 (fodder production), Moc Chau Enterprise for Construction and Construction Materials, Mechanical and Electrical Enterprise, and Moc Chau Tea Factory which, together with Farm 2, was to belong to VINATEA. Interestingly enough, the construction enterprise belongs to the Company, together with Farm 1 and 3. Several interviewees stressed the independence of the Mechanical and Electrical Enterprise.
- 21 The Ministry of Agriculture was responsible for agricultural production.
- 22 The Ministry of Foodstuff was responsible for purchase, processing and distribution of staple food like rice, maize, manioc or sweet potatoes.
- 23 The Ministry for Food Processing was responsible for the purchase, processing or conservation and the sales of meat, milk, beer, other drinks, sugar, sweets, biscuits – sales meant in this context the selling of goods to the Ministry of Home Trade at fixed prices.
- 24 Interview on 28 November 1995.
- 25 Some of the companies in agriculture were VINAFOOD (purchase and trading with foodstuff like rice, maize, manioc etc.), VEGETEXCO (general company for fruit and vegetables), VINACAFE, VINATEA, the general company for rubber, but also enterprise combines concerned with poultry, sugar cane, mulberries and silk worms, etc., or the General Department for Livestock which comprised the Company for Large Livestock (cows and buffaloes), the Company for Smaller Livestock (pigs) and the Company for Fodder.
- 26 According to Decision 610 NN-TCCB/QĐ of 21 December 1988, the Company was an amalgamation of the former Company for Pigs for Breeding and Industrial Production (North), the Company for Dairy Buffaloes, Dairy Cows and Milk (North) and the Company for Fodder and Animal Husbandry Number 1. The Company was established with independent bookkeeping, legal status, its own seal and the right to open its own bank account. Besides the Centre for Insemination of Domestic Animals, several enterprises for breeding pigs, animal feed enterprises the Company comprised eight State Farms and amongst them two in Moc Chau.
- 27 There has been some research into organizational structure and function of Vietnamese enterprise unions, the industrial pendant to a company in agriculture. Jerneck 1995 for example relates to GDR *Kombinate* and *Vereinigung Volkseigener Betriebe* when she discusses the origin of the Vietnamese enterprise unions, but without any reference to the particular role the *Kombinate* played in the Kombinat Reform. It seems that she is not aware of the reforms of the early nineteen eighties in the GDR and of the role the *Kombinate* played in them, nor of similarities and differences between these reforms and what became known a decade later as *Perestroika*. The Vice President of the Central Institute for Economic Management CIEM on the other hand stressed in an interview on 8 December 1995 that Vietnam applied the model of GDR *Kombinate*, as opposed to the combines in Bulgaria or Hungary, although not without having stated first that the basic economic model for all countries, including the GDR and China, came from the Soviet Union. He also referred to the mentioned delegation from the GDR under Mr. Muller which worked with his institute for five years.

- 28 It is interesting to note that German-trained Vietnamese economists refer to the reform experiences in the GDR when discussing the basic problems of the Vietnamese economic mechanisms of the nineteen eighties. I was told that Vietnamese economists used to spend a considerable part of their studies in the GDR in an attempt to understand the production fund levy and to consider how it could work in Vietnam. When asked about the results of such attempts they answered with a detailed description of some of the basic unresolved problems of price formation in Vietnam in the nineteen eighties and of regulations for the formation and use of enterprise funds. Indeed, there was no steering tool comparable to the production fund levy introduced in Vietnam.

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# Agro-commodity chains in Northern Vietnam

## New mechanisms for old stakeholders

PASCAL BERGERET<sup>1</sup>

Since the promulgation of *Khoan* 10 in 1988, agricultural production in Vietnam has increased at a vigorous pace.<sup>2</sup> For instance between 1990 and 1995 the annual production of food crops per capita (expressed in paddy-equivalent) jumped from 324.6 kg to 364.8 kg (+12,4 percent).<sup>3</sup> Similarly the annual production of pork per capita – pork is by far the main meat product consumed in Vietnam – increased from 11 kg to 13.6 kg (+ 23,6 percent).<sup>4</sup> Such figures must be considered while keeping in mind an annual population increase of 2.1 percent. They illustrate the great dynamism presently at work in the agricultural sector.

In the Red River Delta food crops production has also increased dramatically. Between 1990 and 1994 the value of total rice production progressed at an annual average rate of 6,04 percent (at 1994 prices). During the same period the value of pork production grew at an average rate of 6,75 percent per annum.<sup>5</sup> Such results are impressive. Especially by contrast with the food shortages and stagnation of agricultural production during the years preceding the reforms.

Although rice production still appears to be quite dominant, its progression rate is similar to the growth of other products, like pork. As a result, in Northern Vietnam, the overall increase of agricultural production seems to be occurring without diversification, unlike what happened in other countries after having modernized their agricultural sector. In China for instance between 1990 and 1995 while the production of grain remained stable at 445 million tons the production of pork grew from 22,8 to 32 million tons (+40 percent) after a jump of more than 58 percent between 1984 and 1990.<sup>6</sup>

Diversification of agricultural production is often considered as a necessary step leading towards higher farmers' income. The predominantly rice-based economy in the Red River Delta seems to be the underlying cause for the comparative low growth of agricultural income. Indeed research conducted by the Red River Program since 1989 indicates that the regular improvement of farmers' standard of living in the Red River Delta has mainly been brought about by non-agricultural activities undertaken by farm households. This observation is somewhat worrisome as stagnating agricultural incomes can lead to a growing dissatisfaction of producers and the diversion of resources towards other sectors of activity. Then the agricultural sector would no longer be in a position to play a leading role in the economy and rural migration – so far contained to a reason-



able level in Hanoi – could become a major problem. Among the factors explaining the slow pace of agricultural diversification, the way agro-commodity chains operate appears crucial. The comparative analysis of rice, pig and garlic-commodity chains in the Red River Delta enables us to have a better understanding of the reasons why producers are reluctant to change from a logic of food security provided by rice production to a logic of diversification an agricultural enterprise demands.

In this chapter we first describe the main characteristics of those three agro-commodity chains, then for each of them we compare the logic of the producers, the conditions under which State management was abolished in 1988, the present set of relationships between stakeholders and, finally, how risk is shared among those stakeholders.

### **Main characteristics of rice, pig and garlic-commodity chains**

This part and the following ones are mainly based on research work on agro-commodity chains undertaken in the framework of the Red River Program.<sup>7</sup> Some complementary interviews were conducted in 1997. Nam Thanh District (Hai Hung Province) was selected for the study of the production part of the commodity chains.

#### *Rice*

The bulk of the rice produced in the Red River Delta is locally consumed, in rural as well as urban areas. A small part goes to markets in the mountains of the North and Northwest regions, and beyond, to China. In certain years, for example in 1994, rice shortages in South China induced very active yet often illegal exchanges with Vietnam. Such trans-border flows are difficult to quantify. The rice-commodity chain in the Red River Delta involves a great number of stakeholders often of small size: collectors, huskers, wholesalers, transporters, retailers. Short channels (producers – huskers – consumers) are predominant as the majority of the population live in rural areas near the production sites. However Hanoi and Hai Phong cities, as well as the mining province of Quang Ninh (coal mines) are important consumer areas.

#### *Pig*

The bulk of the pork produced in the Red River Delta is also consumed there. In spite of Government's efforts, pork exports outside the country remain very limited.

In the case of the pig-commodity chain long marketing channels towards the cities are predominant because pig production is considered as a source of cash by the producers and is systematically marketed. The diet in rural areas still lacks meat products whereas in the cities meat consumption is much more frequent. In Hanoi, 40 percent of families eat meat on a daily basis and another 46 percent eat meat every other day (Le Goulven 1996). Research conducted in two communes of Nam Thanh District showed that 40 percent and 64 percent of people interviewed respectively declare eating meat less than three times a month.<sup>8</sup> Thus short marketing channels (producers – collectors – rural slaughterers/butchers – rural consumers) play a minimal role in the overall operation of the pig-commodity chain. They mainly deal with low quality meat (high level of fat) and there is a reverse flow of fat pork pieces from the cities to the countryside (Vu Trong Binh, forthcoming). Long supply channels towards the cities (producers – collectors – transporters – urban slaughterers – urban retailers – urban consumers) play a predominant role in setting the major characteristics of the pig-commodity chain including prices.

Moreover in the cities a dynamic pork processing sector is developing fast, involving powerful and well equipped stakeholders.

### *Garlic*

While all farmers in the Red River Delta grow rice and raise pigs only the most well-off fringe produce garlic. Garlic production only occurs in certain geographical zones of the Delta of which Nam Thanh District is a good example.

The garlic-commodity chain contains a limited number of operators among whom wholesalers in the production zones and big buyers near the consumption zones are predominant. Garlic produced in the Red River Delta is mainly sold – as dry bulbs or in powder – on export markets, notably to Thailand and Laos. On those markets Vietnamese garlic must compete with Chinese garlic. The production cost of the latter is said to be less than half the production cost of the former.

### **Producers' logic**

For every farm in the Red River Delta rice and pigs are compulsory, non substitutable productions.

Rice production is devoted to covering farmers' subsistence needs and all producers aim at maximizing it. With an average rice area of 600 m<sup>2</sup> per capita and an annual paddy production of about 350 kg per capita, farmers in the Red River Delta seek maximum food security hence maximum paddy yields whatever the market conditions may be.<sup>9</sup>

Pig production follows a very different logic. It is compulsory because it provides the necessary source of organic matter to maintain crop yields at an acceptable level within very intensive cropping systems (the land utilization ratio in the Red River Delta is over 2). Pig production largely relies on the use of free resources available on the farm for the feeding of the animals (rice bran, small mollusks and frogs gathered around houses, water taros, water hyacinth, kitchen refuses, etc.) and on low input winter crops like sweet potatoes. The main expenses related to pig production are the purchase of piglets and sometimes of veterinary products. With such feeding practices, farmers can somehow produce 2 to 3 pigs a year with a live weight of 70 to 90 kg. Sometimes, if an urgent need of cash arises, pigs can be sold at a smaller weight. Some producers have specialized in the raising a more important number of animals (sometimes up to 10 pigs a year): they often run small agribusinesses and can rely on a steady supply of byproducts to feed the pigs (production of rice wine, tofu or rice husking). Only when market conditions are favorable (when the ratio of the price of the fodder to the price of the pigs is high, that is) are farmers ready to intensify the production of pigs and to invest more in pigs' feed. As a matter of fact, farmers have significantly increased areas under maize cultivation during the last years, primarily in order to be able to feed more pigs. Indeed the above mentioned increase in pig production (see introduction) is largely responsible for the increase of the maize cultivation areas.

Such a double logic, combining the use of free feed resources and intensification of pig production when market conditions are favorable explains the fluctuations observed during the past years. For instance the annual rate of growth of pig production in the Red River Delta (Dao The) was: - 4.41 percent in 1991, + 12.62 percent in 1992, + 16.19 percent in 1993 and + 10.99 percent in 1994 (calculation made on the basis of the 1994 prices).<sup>10</sup>

Garlic production is completely monetised and market oriented.

A winter cash crop, garlic can be replaced by other winter crops in the crop rotation (maize, sweet potatoes, potatoes, soybean, mungbean, etc....). The magnitude of the area under garlic cultivation for a certain year is linked to farm gate prices obtained the year before. Farmers' objective when growing garlic is clearly to maximize monetary benefits. The total value of inputs necessary to grow garlic is high (seeds, fertilizer, pesticides...) which makes this production a risky one, only fitted to the most well-off farmers. When market conditions are unfavorable producers prefer to shift to other less risky productions or to off-farm activities and reduce the acreage under garlic cultivation. Such a logic explains the big variations in areas devoted to garlic observed year on year.

## **The conditions of State withdrawal**

By the end of the nineteen eighties the State suppressed prices control and withdrew from managing the distribution of agricultural goods. Such a brisk withdrawal had immediate and dramatic consequences as shown in 1989 by the growth of the paddy production which jumped by + 7.4 percent (such a result can partly be attributed to the sudden appearance on the market – and in the statistics – of a significant part of rice production previously used to feed the animals because farmers had no incentives to market it).

However the withdrawal of the State followed different patterns in the three agro-commodity chains considered in this paper.

### *Rice*

It can be said that as far as the rice-commodity chain is concerned State withdrawal occurred in an orderly manner. State enterprises which before 1988 had been in charge of collecting paddy, husking it and distributing rice to urban consumers ran down their operations progressively with apparently a great deal of concern for the future of their work force. For instance employees of big State rice processing factories in the provincial towns in the Red River Delta (like Hai Duong) were offered credit with very favorable terms so that they could equip themselves with small rice huskers and start their own businesses. In Hai Duong an adjacent street to the state-owned processing plant was soon full with dozens of small private husking enterprises.

But these new stakeholders were not all old employees of the State factory. A certain number (10 among the 20 husking businesses still operating in this street at present) were individuals having somehow managed to accumulate a small capital during the previous period and wanting to take such an opportunity to operate on their own. Other employees of the State factory were less enterprising and preferred staying within the district and on the payroll of the factory where they were assigned a small capital to manage in the name of the factory by conducting husking and rice selling operations. Furthermore the factory also facilitated the access of their staff to preferential credit by the Agricultural Development Bank in order to develop private micro businesses of paddy husking and rice selling within the factory.

A network of private transporters also appeared very quickly. They started by using trucks belonging to State enterprises on a contract basis. But the profits they generated soon enabled them to buy their own transport means. The new transporters became the link between the new private paddy husking enterprises and new urban wholesalers. In the cities the withdrawal of the State from distribution channels was the signal for numerous new wholesalers and retailers to establish themselves with the capital they had previously some-

how accumulated and which could suddenly be lawfully invested in the new businesses.

In the countryside individual husking enterprises were already numerous because since 1981 farmers were allowed to keep for themselves the amount of paddy produced above the quota set by the production contract with the co-operatives. Such quantities of paddy retained by individual families had to be locally husked.<sup>11</sup>

As early as 1989 many farmers established themselves as petty paddy traders. They formed a tight network of paddy collectors in the villages, often transporting on bicycles small quantities of paddy to be processed by the new private husking businesses in nearby provincial or district towns.

Thus at all levels of the rice-commodity chain a big number of new private stakeholders, often of modest size, were allowed to enter business and to seize the opportunities given by the withdrawal of the State. However the State kept control of a regulatory stock of rice called 'stock A 34' which amounts to 400 to 500 000 tons for the whole country. The agents locally in charge of maintaining and renewing this stock remain important stakeholders in the rice-commodity chain.

### *Pig*

As far as the pig-commodity chain is concerned the withdrawal of the State can be accurately described as a collapse. Big State slaughter houses suddenly stopped all activities in 1989. But existing underground networks involved in illicit pig slaughtering and pork trading suddenly became openly activated and developed further. Unlike rice, a strategic commodity tightly managed by the State sector during the collectivist period, pig production and the trade of pork were more loosely supervised by the Cooperatives and State authorities, leaving room for an active black market to flourish. Such illegal activities were more or less tolerated during the collectivist period. Black market operators seized the opportunity given by the new economic policy to consolidate their position and they soon controlled the whole pig-commodity chain. For instance a good number of rural slaughterers/butchers presently operating were already involved in those activities during the collectivist period when individual meat businesses were theoretically banned. As a result in the late nineteen eighties/early nineteen nineties entry by newcomers into the pig-commodity chain was very limited. A case in point is provided by pork retailers in the cities: a typical female job, this activity is often reserved for members of old networks long involved in legal or illegal trade of pork, or to their daughters.<sup>12</sup>

### *Garlic*

De-collectivisation in 1989 did not immediately affect the garlic-commodity chain. State enterprises involved in garlic processing carried on buying garlic from the producers and selling it on export markets in Eastern Europe, the only outlet for Vietnamese garlic at the time. After the collapse of the USSR such markets were lost and the State enterprises had to stop their activities in 1991. The whole sector was deeply affected and the producers were badly hit, the more so because during the previous period prices had remained high and the sale of garlic assured by export contracts. In 1992 the area under garlic cultivation in Nam Thanh District dropped dramatically as compared with 1991, from 1000 ha down to 420 ha. Only in the recent years 'new' markets established in Thailand and Laos there has been a revival of activities in this sector. But nowadays the garlic-commodity chain is totally controlled by private entrepreneurs.

### **Polarization, information flow and the quality of products**

#### *Rice*

State withdrawal from the rice-commodity chain led to the appearance of numerous new stakeholders entering into business without barriers. This state of affairs makes the rice-commodity chain an economic system where competition can play at all levels. For instance private husking businesses in Hai Duong town are now facing stiff competition from similar businesses newly established along the roads of nearby rural districts on the way to Quang Ninh province. Transporters from Quang Ninh often prefer buying from husking enterprises outside the town because it reduces their cost and it allows them to escape police harassment, which is much more frequent in town. As a result the frequency of transporters from Quang Ninh buying from husking businesses in Hai Duong town has decreased sharply.

Furthermore the weight of short marketing channels in price formation makes producers' access to information on prices easy. The definition of different rice grades and qualities is objective and clear: it relies on the kind of rice variety considered. Opportunities of fraud are limited. They can occur when paddy huskers keep for themselves a portion of rice bran left in the machines or on the floor of the workshop. Or when a rice retailer mixes different varieties and sells the lot at the price of the most expensive one. But such dubious practices are limited in scope because stakeholders in the commodity chain are prompt and free to change partners if necessary. Thus the rice-commodity chain can be described as a setting where information flows are symmetrical and multidirectional. Price variations on consumers' markets are conveyed up to

the producers as well as price differences resulting from the quality of rice. Such transparent operation makes State control easier even if certain years the attraction of trans-border prices results in an active black market with China (principally based on shipments of rice coming from South Vietnam) or if the management of 'stock A 34' is sometimes less than orthodox.

### *Pig*

The situation in the pig-commodity chain with predominantly long marketing channels for supplying the cities is quite different. In this commodity, chain information flows are asymmetrical and transactions are polarized on one category of stakeholders: urban slaughterers. These urban slaughterers were probably already active in the underground channels operating during the collectivist period. They were able to create networks of collectors which they now totally control. In the absence of any frigorific facility pigs must be slaughtered near the consumption markets and collectors must transport them live to the urban slaughterers as quickly as possible after their purchase from the producers in order to minimize weight losses or mortality risks.

Collectors are thus completely dependent on the urban slaughterers. Separate networks have emerged in which one urban slaughterer enjoys complete exclusivity of relationships with a set of collectors operating in a specific rural area. Urban slaughterers are in fierce competition with each other not so much over prices but over the share of territory covered by their respective network of collectors. Such a competition has resulted in a consolidation process with the emergence of very powerful operators. Down the marketing channels urban slaughterers have similarly secured a clientele of retailers who come to the slaughtering houses before dawn in order to get their daily supply of pork to sell on the various markets of the cities.

Urban slaughterers are in a favorable position having access to information coming from rural production zones as well as from urban consumption markets. Moreover their role is similar that one of matchmakers between the collectors and the retailers: urban slaughterers generally do not actually buy the animals themselves. They only organize the transactions between collectors and retailers, slaughter the pigs and charge a commission for their service. The urban slaughterers thus do not bear any of the risks related to the purchase of the pigs. Rather they facilitate negotiations between collectors and retailers thanks to their access to valuable information.

They keep their network of retailers by providing credit to them. They maintain a very close relationship with their network of collectors by accommodating them during the nights they spend in the city and by offering them protection against harassment by the police or by gangs affiliated with rival slaughterers. Transport of live pigs often occurs during the night and can be dangerous.

Good protection by a powerful urban slaughterer can prove to be helpful. Such asymmetrical flows of information and the predominant role played by urban slaughterers are reinforced by the ambiguity with which the quality of pigs is taken into account.

On consumers' markets the quality of pork is relatively well defined for a given piece of meat on the basis of the rate of fat. For a same cut differences in the rate of fat can account for differences of price up to 10 percent. But as far as live pigs are concerned the appreciation of quality is merely visual or partly based on the knowledge of the pig's history (mainly as to how the pigs were fed).<sup>13</sup> During the transaction at the slaughter house prices are negotiated as the pigs are still alive and the retailers can only rely on their visual expertise to assess quality whereas the collectors and the urban slaughterer can rely on information they gathered about the background of the pigs. At the farm level the probable amount of fat of the pig only plays a marginal role in price formation. Between a lean and a fat pig (the latter being more difficult to sell) price differences rarely fluctuate more than 2 percent. This situation does not favor producers' because they are not in a position to benefit from the increased demand for quality pork from the consumers. Generally speaking the pig-commodity chain is still marked by its history during the collectivist era and the years of State withdrawal. Asymmetrical flows of information resulting from the predominant role of one type of stakeholders and from uncertainties related to quality assessment hamper the exercise of free competition. Producers are the main victims of this situation. During the week of the traditional Vietnamese new year (*Tet*) in February 1997 the retail price of pork jumped by about 50 percent on Hanoi markets and by 30 percent in Hai Duong, close to Nam Thanh district, where pig prices at the farm level only increased by 5 percent during the same period.

### *Garlic*

This commodity chain is strongly polarized around a limited number of stakeholders and export markets absorb the major part of the production (about 80 percent in Nam Thanh district). Near Nam Thanh district on the road to Hai Phong there is a small town where about a hundred families are engaged in the trade of garlic, including garlic of Chinese origin re-exported to Thailand and Laos. Locally produced Vietnamese garlic represents about 60 percent of the total volume handled by these traders (1995 figures) and is in competition with Chinese garlic. Although their production cost is double that of Chinese garlic, Vietnamese varieties are appreciated for their strong odor and for their early harvest. Furthermore Chinese garlic is heavily taxed at the border which increases its price on the final market (the price of garlic increases by 100 USD/ton from the Chinese border to Nam Thanh and the transport costs from Nam Thanh to Ho Chi Minh City in the South represent another 70 USD/ton increase). Quality is



very precisely defined and depends on the size of bulbs and on the variety (color, odor). There are many different categories of garlic and prices seem to fluctuate independently from one sort to the other. Price fluctuations within the same year and from year to year are common on the export markets and are linked to the precise and changing nature of the export demands.

Moreover import prices of Chinese garlic are also very unstable. For instance between January and March 1997 the border price of a particular type of Chinese garlic was divided by three. Such unpredictable price characteristics make production and trade of garlic very risky activities where profits and losses can be high. In fact price formation largely takes place outside Vietnam whether in China or on export markets. Such external constraints have imposed a certain degree of solidarity within the Vietnamese portion of the marketing channels. In particular flows of information on price are quick and symmetrical.

Profitability of stakeholders business depend on their expertise, their financial capabilities and the speed with which they react to price changes. For instance traders must be able to buy big quantities of garlic and send them to the South of the country as soon as prices become favorable. Producers must be able to keep their garlic and store it as long as prices are low. In fact they have to manage the sale of their production in accordance with the instant demand of the market rather than with the instant needs of their family. This kind of logic can only be found among the most well-off section of the farmers population for whom garlic represents an income complementary to other safer sources. One then understands why garlic production in Nam Thanh remains unstable and limited.

### **Conclusion: the distribution of risk**

The experience of countries where agriculture has been modernized shows that long term development of production can only be secured if the producers risk is not too high. The description of rice, pig and garlic-commodity chains in the Red River delta confirms this fact. The operation of the rice-commodity chain shows that producers must only bear climatic risks which are inherent to agriculture. The logic of food security which lies behind rice production has resulted in a strong and stable increase of yields. Symmetric flows of information and a good level of competition within the marketing channels have reassured the producers that they could use the market and sell paddy when they need cash even if that means they will have to buy rice later. One can conclude that a certain degree of confidence in the market has established itself among producers.

On the opposite side in the garlic-commodity chain all stakeholders have to bear a considerable amount of risk and investment in garlic production and trade is more of a speculative nature. As long as import and export markets

remain unstable, outlets insecure, and as long as mechanisms to regulate the producer's risks are not found garlic production cannot be developed on a sustainable basis.

As far as the pig-commodity chain is concerned the situation is more complex. As pig production is compulsory in every farm a minimum supply is guaranteed to the markets. But the somewhat erratic evolution of quantities produced shows that above this minimum level of supply the intensification of pig production faces a considerable amount of risk. This is in contradiction with the characteristics of urban pork demand which is regularly growing and requires higher quality meat as urban incomes get higher. Between urban markets and the producers a set of stakeholders are enjoying a predominant position and are able to reap most of the benefits generated by this expanding market.

One understands better the above examples why agriculture diversification out of rice seems to have reached a plateau in the Red River delta. And the more so as urbanization and the overall economic growth have created a great deal of opportunities for non-farm incomes. But such a development pattern, if it continues much longer, would reduce the agricultural sector to playing a minimal role in household economies which can hardly be suited to a country where 70 percent of the labor force is still engaged in agriculture.

## Notes

- 1 Agroeconomist, coordinator, Red River Programme, c/o French Embassy, 57 Tran Hung Dao, Hanoi, Vietnam.
- 2 '*Khoan 10*' is a set of policy measures taken by the Communist Party of Vietnam bringing an effective end to collectivisation in the agricultural sector. Since then, agricultural production has been relying on farm households and most marketing functions have been operated by private stakeholders.
- 3 Comprising paddy, maize, sweet potato, cassava and potato.
- 4 General Statistical Office 1996: 27, 82; Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Statistical tables on animal production, personal communication.
- 5 Dao The Tuan & Le Thi Chau Dung 1997: 8.
- 6 Claude Aubert 1996: 527.
- 7 Most recent results on this topic are contained in not yet published works:
  - Katell Le Goulven, 'Les formes de coordination de la filière de viande porcine dans le delta du Fleuve Rouge, Vietnam du Nord'. Mémoire de DIAT et de DEA, Economie du Développement Agricole, Agro-alimentaire et Rural, Centre National d'Etudes Agronomiques des Régions Chaudes, Ecole Nationale Supérieure Agronomique de Montpellier, Université de Montpellier 1, France, 1996, 110.
  - Le Duc Thinh, Hoang Khanh Phuong, 'Production des cultures sèches d'hiver à Nam Thanh, Hai Hung'. Communication au séminaire Agriculture Familiale et Gestion des Ressources du milieu dans le delta du Fleuve Rouge organisé à Hanoi en Avril 1996 par l'Institut National des Sciences Agronomiques du Vietnam, et le GRET.

- Vu Trong Binh, 'La commercialisation de la viande porcine dans le delta du Fleuve Rouge', Communication au séminaire Agriculture Familiale et Gestion des Ressources du milieu dans le delta du Fleuve Rouge organisé à Hanoi en Avril 1996 par l'Institut National des Sciences Agronomiques du Vietnam et le GRET.
- Pham Hoang Ha, 'Les transformations de la filière riz au Vietnam. Cas de la région du delta du Fleuve Rouge'. Thèse de Master of Science, Institut Agronomique Méditerranéen, Montpellier, France, 1996, 110 p.
- 8 According to a study by the National Institute of Nutrition, Hanoi: Nguyen Chi Tam, *et al.* Nutritional status of mothers and children under 5 years of age and some affecting factors in Thai Tan and Quoc Tuan communes, Nam Thanh district, Hai Hung province. Report submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements of the work practice of the Master of Science in Community Nutrition Programme. National Institute of Nutrition, Hanoi, 1995. (Unpublished)
- 9 General Statistical Office 1996: 85, 87.
- 10 Dao The Tuan & Le Thi Chau Dung 1977.
- 11 'Khoan 100' promulgated by the Communist Party in 1981 is considered as the first step towards de-collectivisation of agricultural production in Vietnam. It made provision for individual production contracts to be agreed between co-op members and the cooperative. Once the quantities of agricultural products mentioned in the contract were delivered to the co-op the members could keep what had been produced in excess for themselves. This policy provided a temporary boost to agricultural production.
- 12 In the ever changing landscape of trade in the cities of Vietnam a new trend seems has emerged: new itinerant retailers of meat now cruise through the streets of Hanoi. They seem to come from sub-urban districts and compete with long established fixed retailers (information given by Katell Le Goulven).
- 13 At present the pigs marketed in the Red River Delta are crossbreeds between local and western strains. The proportion of fat in the meat essentially depends on the way the animals are fed.

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- General Statistical Office  
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# Transformations et permanence de l'habitat rural dans le delta du Fleuve Rouge

Exemple du village de Dao Xa entre 1955 et 1993

JEAN-PHILIPPE FONTENELLE<sup>1</sup> & MAI VAN HAI<sup>2</sup>

Le village ou *lang* de Dao Xa fait partie de la commune de An Binh, district de Nam Sach, province de Hai Duong. Nam Sach est un des sites sur lesquels travaille le Programme Fleuve Rouge. Le choix du village de Dao Xa s'est opéré à posteriori, après que l'équipe ait initié des travaux de recherche sur la gestion sociale de l'eau dans la commune de An Binh. Situé dans le bassin du fleuve Thai Binh, Dao Xa correspond à un village de type 'Kim Thanh', selon la classification de Pierre Gourou: Dans le district de Nam Sach, les 'villages (sont) répartis régulièrement sur le territoire, sans forme nette; leurs contours sont capricieux et déchiquetés' (1930). Dao Xa est le plus petit des quatre villages que comprend An Binh, à savoir An Dong, An Doai, Da Dinh et Dao Xa. Il ne comprend qu'un seul hameau, ou *thôn*.

L'objet de cette communication est de faire apparaître certains des éléments structurant l'habitat rural d'un village du delta du Fleuve Rouge. Pour cela, nous comparerons les plans d'habitation du village de Dao Xa en 1955, avant la réforme agraire de 1958, puis en 1993. Cette étude diachronique permettra dans un premier temps de faire ressortir les évolutions majeures de l'habitat villageois durant la période étudiée. Puis, dans un second temps, grâce à l'utilisation des registres généalogiques, ou *gia pha*, tenus à jour par les aînés des principaux lignages, nous montrerons comment certaines pratiques sociales de transmission patrimoniale perdurent et impriment leur marque dans l'habitat, et ce quelque soit la force des événements historiques des 40 dernières années.

## Dao Xa en 1955

Avant de s'intéresser au village tel qu'il se présente aujourd'hui, nous allons en faire la description à partir du plan de 1955 reconstitué avec les agriculteurs. A cette époque Dao Xa comptait 56 foyers répartis au sein d'un espace habité serré entre mares, haie de bambous et chemins.<sup>3</sup> Les mares, toujours présentes aujourd'hui, étaient alors connectées les unes aux autres jusqu'à un bras-mort du fleuve, ou arroyo. Elles servaient de réservoirs pour l'irrigation des terres de

rizières entourant Dao Xa. Sur le plan, nous pouvons observer que les mares divisaient le village en deux parties. Cette limite marquait la division entre les deux quartiers, ou *xóm*, du village: le *xóm làng* à l'Ouest et le *xóm trai* à l'Est. Les qualificatifs de *làng*, village, et de *trai*, campement ou ferme, sont à mettre en relation avec l'extension progressive de l'habitat villageois, Dao Xa s'étant limité à une époque au seul quartier *làng*. L'existence de deux quartiers distincts se caractérisait également par la présence de deux puits collectifs, *giếng*, qui approvisionnaient en eau les foyers de chacun des deux *xóm*. Deux portes permettaient d'entrer et de sortir de Dao Xa, une était située au Nord, l'autre au Sud. Selon les agriculteurs interrogés, les premières familles qui se sont installées à Dao Xa, appartenaient aux lignages Tran Huu, Truong Phuc et Tran Huy. Celles-ci s'installèrent dans la zone du *xóm làng* qui est topographiquement plus élevée. Ensuite vinrent les lignages Dam Dinh, Nguyen Chi et Nguyen Dinh. La généalogie du lignage Tran Huu, le plus ancien selon les dires, comprend 14 générations, ce qui permet de faire remonter l'existence du village à environ 350 ans, soit courant xvième (Mai Van Hai & Bui Xuan Dinh 1997).

Le plan reconstitué fait ressortir une certaine hétérogénéité des terrains d'habitation due à l'existence de quelques lots nettement plus vastes que les autres. Ceux-ci appartenaient aux foyers les plus aisés du villages: Tran Huu Suc, Tran Huy Y, Truong Phuc Vénh, Tran Huu Mao et Truong Phuc Venh. Ces personnes furent respectivement déclarées 'grands propriétaires', pour les trois premiers, et 'paysans riches', pour les deux derniers, à la réforme agraire qui dura de 1955 à 1957 (Mai Van Hai & Bui Xuan Dinh 1997). Les autres foyers de Dao Xa étaient constitués, selon la classification officielle, de 13 'paysans moyens', de 31 'paysans pauvres' et de 7 'paysans sans terres'. L'observation du plan du village permet également de noter que les terrains d'habitation de personnes d'un même lignage étaient souvent voisins. Ce phénomène est particulièrement visible pour le lignage Dam Dinh, dans la partie Est de Dao Xa. Une mise en perspective de la localisation de l'habitat, dans cette partie du village, selon le niveau de parenté liant deux voisins Dam Dinh l'un à l'autre, permet de faire apparaître des relations de parenté proche de type frère-frère, tels Nhâm et Thi, et oncle-neveu, tel Chung avec Di et Dôi. Cette visualisation montre comment se faisait la transmission du terrain d'habitation à la descendance mâle, par division du foncier paternel. La maison paternelle revenait traditionnellement à l'aîné de sexe mâle qui avait pour charge d'aider ses parents jusqu'à la fin de leurs jours, puis de s'occuper, après leur mort, de l'autel du foyer destiné au culte des parents disparus (Nguyen Van Huyen 1994). Les cadets recevaient un bout de jardin pour y établir leur nouveau foyer alors que les filles suivaient leurs époux et ne bénéficiaient en principe d'aucun bien foncier de la part de leur père. Cette règle n'était cependant pas absolue, surtout lorsque le père, riche, n'avait pas de fils mais voulait conserver ses biens sans les transmettre à un frère ou un neveu (Martin du Pont 1995). Il pouvait alors soit prendre un fils adoptif

pour s'assurer une postérité, soit transmettre ceux-ci à sa fille aînée (Nguyen Van Huyen 1994). Cependant, si les villageois tiennent une généalogie à jour, le mode d'affiliation au lignage est patrilinéaire, ce qui complique les recherches sur les pratiques passées de transmission du patrimoine. Les seules femmes apparaissant dans les cahiers généalogiques familiaux, filles comme épouses, sont celles ayant eu une destinée particulièrement digne d'être retenue. Il semble que cela soit, selon les critères villageois, peu fréquent, vu leur faible représentation dans les registres lignagers.

### Les transformations subies par Dao Xa depuis 1955

Trois transformations majeures attirent l'attention lorsqu'on observe le plan de Dao Xa en 1993. Sans quelconque hiérarchie de celles-ci les unes par rapport aux autres, il est tout d'abord visible qu'un chemin traverse le village d'Ouest en Est par son milieu. La construction de ce chemin a permis de connecter le village au centre de la commune de An Binh, ce qui n'était pas le cas avant puisque les deux portes de Dao Xa s'ouvraient selon une direction perpendiculaire à celle se dirigeant vers le centre de la commune actuelle. Notons que pendant toute la première moitié du vingtième siècle, Dao Xa constituait une commune, ou *xã*, au même titre que Da Dinh. L'indépendance administrative acquise par la séparation d'avec Da Dinh ne représente qu'un des aspects de l'autonomie des *làng xã* à propos de laquelle de nombreux auteurs tels que Pierre Gourou (1931), Nguyen Tu Chi (1980) et Nguyen Khac Tung (1981) ont écrit, et dont l'absence de chemin n'est qu'une des marques visibles. Avant la construction du nouveau chemin, il n'était en effet pas possible de se rendre à Da Dinh en ligne directe faute de pont pour traverser l'arroyo. Il fallait soit passer par la digue, au Nord, soit passer par les rizières, au Sud. La construction du chemin a eu lieu en 1963 époque à partir de laquelle fut appliquée la volonté politique d'affaiblir l'autonomie des villages, perçue comme rétrograde, dans le but de moderniser la société nord-vietnamienne par la mise en place de coopératives de production. Si en 1963, il n'existait pas encore de coopératives communales, cette date correspond à la création des brigades spécialisées telles la brigade hydraulique et la brigade 202. Elle marque le début des grands travaux d'aménagement de l'espace anciennement privé et nouvellement collectivisé, dont le réseau hydraulique est l'exemple phare, mais dont le chemin de desserte fait également partie.

Les deux autres changements majeurs sont quant à eux l'expression différente du même phénomène. Il s'agit de l'agrandissement du village et de la réduction de la taille des terrains d'habitation, en réaction à la forte augmentation de la population durant la période étudiée. En 1994, les données de population faisaient état de 194 foyers, soient 702 habitants. Entre 1945 et 1994, la population a été multipliée par 3,5, valeur comparable au facteur multiplicatif

de 3,6 donné pour l'ensemble du pays entre 1940 et 1993 (Dao The Tuân 1995). Nous en déduisons que l'augmentation de la population de Dao Xa est due avant tout à un accroissement démographique interne, plutôt qu'à l'arrivée de familles extérieures au village.

Les premières habitations créées en dehors du cadre 'historique' du village datent de 1965. Elles ont pu être construites après autorisation et don de terre agricole collectivisée de la part de la coopérative agricole de production. Alors que précédemment l'habitat semblait restreint au cadre défini par les mares, la haie de bambous, les chemins et les puits collectifs, la période collectiviste a permis à celui-ci de grandir. Les nouveaux quartiers se sont principalement créés à l'Est et au Sud, puis à l'Ouest du village. Les parties Est et Sud ont d'abord été préférées car leurs terres sont topographiquement plus hautes. Mais, afin d'éviter d'empiéter trop fortement sur les terres agricoles, la partie Ouest, plus basse, fut ensuite colonisée par remblai sur les mares. Si l'on s'intéresse en détails à ces quartiers, nous remarquons qu'ils sont majoritairement 'colonisés' par des lignages faiblement représentés dans le village en 1955. Le lignage Le Van, au Sud-Est de Dao Xa, en est un exemple. Ce dernier, bien qu'ancien, n'avait pas de situation dominante dans le village avant la période collectiviste. Ouvriers agricoles pour la plupart, ils étaient souvent logés chez le propriétaire pour lequel ils travaillaient, et ne possédaient pas de maison personnelle. De plus, un des représentants Le Van assumait traditionnellement la tâche peu considérée de crieur public, ou *mo lang*.

Les petits lignages profitèrent visiblement de la possibilité d'extension de l'espace habité, pour s'installer en dehors du cadre ancien du village, mais il n'en est pas de même pour les lignages ayant une présence plus forte. D'une part, les lots des foyers classés grands propriétaires et paysans riches ont perdu leur marquage lignager. Ce phénomène est dû aux expropriations qui ont eu lieu au moment de la réforme agraire. Seul, l'exemple des terrains Truong Phuc situés à l'Ouest du village semble contredire en partie cette réalité, les lots ayant en fait été distribués à des neveux classés paysans sans terre et paysans pauvres. D'autre part, l'évolution des 'quartiers' ayant conservé leur identité lignagère montre une extrême division du foncier d'habitation. Ainsi, la zone Dam Dinh qui comprenait en 1955 huit lots, comptait en 1993 vingt lots, dont trois devenus Nguyen Dinh. Ces valeurs impliquent une réduction moyenne d'un facteur 2,5 de la taille de chaque terrain d'habitation. En comparant ce taux aux 3,5 d'augmentation de la population et en supposant que le sexe ratio est de 1 pour 1, nous en déduisons que l'installation des seuls fils ne suffit pas à expliquer une telle augmentation du nombre de lots d'habitation. L'apport de familles extérieures étant faible, nous en déduisons qu'une partie des filles s'est installée au village.

## Permanence de la structure de l'habitat de Dao Xa depuis 1955

L'observation des transformations subies par Dao Xa n'annule pas pour autant les questions relatives à la stabilité remarquable de certains 'quartiers' lignagers. L'exemple des Dam Dinh peut être tout d'abord décrit et analysé pour en comprendre la logique. Nous avons observé les lots détenus en 1955 par les deux frères Nhâm et Thi. Ils montrent tous les deux la même évolution qui est l'installation des fils autour du père, tout comme eux avaient pu bénéficier de cette pratique à l'époque de leur installation. Seuls les fils du deuxième lit de Monsieur Nhâm et ceux ayant quitté le village pour aller travailler dans les fabriques des villes, n'ont pu bénéficier de l'attribution d'un lot près de leur père. Ils sont pour les premiers tels Vuong et Trao, partis s'installer dans les nouveaux quartiers, les autres, tels Sach et Thanh, s'étant mariés au dehors et installés sur le lieu d'habitation de leur épouse. Cette pratique est claire pour le lignage Dam Dinh dans sa majorité et apparaît bien visible pour de nombreux lots de la partie ancienne de Dao Xa. En nous intéressant aux nouveaux quartiers, nous avons pu la retrouver dans cette zone d'habitation où de part son histoire, cela semblait moins évident.

Le nouveau quartier sud-est à dominance Le Van permet en effet d'observer le même phénomène de contrôle effectué par le lignage prépondérant. Sur les quinze lots d'habitation existant en 1993, 10 ont un lien de parenté direct ou par alliance avec Monsieur Le Van Nho, membre du lignage Le Van le plus âgé dans le quartier. Celui-ci a obtenu son terrain de la coopérative en 1969. Avant cette date, il avait dans un premier temps récupéré une des habitations de Monsieur Truong Phuc Venh, ancien grand propriétaire pour lequel il travaillait avant la réforme agraire. Son frère aîné, Le Van Ca, décédé aujourd'hui, a également bénéficié d'un lot dans ce quartier, ce qui fait que 8 des 10 lots ont un lien de parenté directe. Les deux derniers lots appartiennent à des Dam Dinh, père et fils, qui sont liés aux Le Van par une relation d'alliance matrimoniale datant de 1985.

Selon la tradition vietnamienne, chacun possède 'deux familles', la parenté paternelle, ou *ho noi* (parenté en dedans) et la parenté maternelle, ou *ho ngoai* (parenté en dehors). De ce fait, l'alliance matrimoniale ne se restreint pas à l'union de deux individus mais prend réellement l'ampleur d'une "histoire de famille" (Nguyen Van Huyen 1994). Elle permet de nouer des liens sociaux durables avec son voisin, et repousse la limite du territoire 'étranger', les anciens voisins devenant des parents par alliance, soient des alliés potentiels. L'alliance des Dam Dinh et des Le Van, qui était recherchée par Le Van Nho, doit être perçue dans ce sens. En effet, ce mariage a été l'occasion de vives protestations de la part des membres dominants de chacun des lignages forts de Dao Xa. Ceux-ci s'opposaient à une alliance contre coutume qui voyait s'allier un lignage faible, déconsidéré, à un lignage important. Le statut peu enviable des Le Van de Dao Xa est dû à plusieurs raisons. Tout d'abord, ceux-ci étaient ouvriers agricoles et



étaient logés chez leur maître avant 1955. De plus, la fonction de crieur public qu'ils assumaient, a mauvaise réputation dans un village et ne représente pas un titre honorifique pour celui qui en a la charge. Enfin, nous pouvons observer que deux des filles de Le Van Ca sont mères non mariées, ce qui va à l'encontre de la morale vietnamienne. De ce fait, traditionnellement, les fils Le Van épousaient des filles de petits lignages et ne pouvaient pas nouer d'alliance forte au sein de Dao Xa. Quant aux filles, elles épousaient un jeune d'un autre village ou région, tel Nguyen Huu Phu qui vient de Da Nang. Pour l'anecdote, il est dit que le mariage n'a pas pu être empêché du fait de la beauté de Mademoiselle Le Thi Loan, qui avait subjugué le jeune Dam Dinh Quy.

Les autres lots non apparentés aux Le Van ont pour leur majorité, fait l'objet d'une transaction depuis leur attribution à la fin des années 1960. Il en va ainsi pour les terrains de Dam Dinh Tho, acheté en 1982, Dam Dinh Viet, acheté en 1990, et Dam Dinh Tuan, acheté en 1990. Avant leur achat par un tiers, ces lots avaient été donnés par la coopérative, à des personnes appartenant à des petits lignages de Dao Xa, respectivement Nguyen Dinh Yen, Pham Huu Phan et Nguyen Van Vuong. Ces transactions montrent comment le lignage Dam Dinh, le plus important en nombre, est actuellement en train d'étendre son aire d'influence dans Dao Xa, en achetant progressivement certains des lots distribués aux petits lignages durant l'époque collectiviste. Cette évolution de la 'couleur' lignagère du quartier décrit, permet de comprendre d'autant mieux l'intérêt que pouvait avoir Le Van Nho à rechercher une alliance avec un membre du lignage Dam Dinh.

Le quartier décrit ci-dessus n'a été créé qu'il y a trente ans à peine, dans un contexte historique de collectivisation des moyens de production qui ne favorisait pas à priori le 'marquage lignager' du territoire d'habitation. L'observation de cet exemple montre pourtant que quelques soient les contraintes historiques externes et l'origine plus ou moins favorisée des agriculteurs, leurs pratiques ont peu ou pas évolué au moment de l'installation des fils. La structure de l'habitat, conséquence de pratiques sociales fortes, conserve de ce fait une certaine stabilité ainsi qu'une homogénéité qui estompent l'effet des événements historiques vécus par le Vietnam durant les quarante dernières années : réforme agraire, collectivisation.

### **Colonisations exogène et endogène**

L'histoire récente du village de Dao Xa telle que nous avons pu la reconstruire à partir des plans d'habitation, des registres lignagers et des entretiens avec les anciens du village, est fragmentaire et mérite des recherches ultérieures. Cependant, les transformations spatiales et les pratiques sociales décrites, nous amènent à poser un certain nombre d'hypothèses sur la formation progressive de

l'espace habité de Dao Xa, en particulier, et du delta du Fleuve Rouge, de façon plus générale. Nous avons pu mettre en évidence deux étapes d'accroissement du village, par la création du *xom trai*, qui est ancienne, et celle des nouveaux quartiers, durant la période collectiviste. Le fait que les limites entre les quartiers soient bien prononcées, d'une part par des éléments physiques tels que des mares et des chemins, et d'autre part par une séparation de l'aire d'habitation des lignages, exprime l'idée d'un phénomène discontinu de colonisation de l'espace habité. Selon nous, la colonisation de l'espace se fait en deux étapes distinctes. Tout d'abord, a lieu une étape de colonisation exogène du milieu qui consiste à venir s'installer dans un endroit inoccupé. Cette étape est ponctuelle et résulte d'une opportunité externe initiée par l'Etat, comme une politique initiative, une réforme agraire, un changement de mode de gestion des moyens de production ... Ensuite vient l'étape de colonisation endogène de l'espace, qui se traduit par le morcellement progressif de l'espace colonisé, terres agricoles comme lots d'habitation, par les chefs d'exploitation, au profit de leur descendance. C'est une phase continue de densification et d'intensification de l'utilisation du foncier.

Cette idée en soit n'est pas nouvelle, elle a déjà été émise par Pierre Gourou qui caractérisait l'unité vietnamienne 'd'unité en chaîne' où le riz, 'plante peu-plante', déterminait la logique de colonisation au fur et à mesure de l'augmentation de la population et de la diminution des ressources alimentaires (Gourou 1936). De même, Nguyen Huu Giai (1937) et Nguyen Van Huyen (1944) ont décrit le processus de colonisation progressive du Vietnam par installation successive de camps de colons, *don dien*, pour le défrichement de terres agricoles, sous l'impulsion incitative ou coercitive de l'Etat central. Il en va de même actuellement avec le vaste mouvement de front pionnier qui vise la colonisation des plateaux du centre Vietnam et le désengorgement des deux deltas, Fleuve Rouge et Mékong.

La nuance que nous apportons est de montrer que ces sauts successifs perdurent aujourd'hui dans le delta du Fleuve Rouge, dans un contexte de saturation du foncier agricole et ne sont donc pas dus au seul fait de la recherche de rizières nouvelles. Ainsi, en est-il pour les quartiers issus de la période collectiviste, et plus récemment des abords des axes routiers. Ces derniers font l'objet d'une colonisation progressive, depuis la réforme sur le statut des terres de 1993, par l'attribution de lots constructibles individuels. Selon nous, les déterminants majeurs qui initient la colonisation d'un nouvel espace d'habitation sont avant tout politiques et sociaux, avant d'être agricoles. Il s'opère en premier lieu une incitation politique externe, qui débouche sur l'initiation d'un mouvement de colonisation exogène, pour ensuite déboucher sur une colonisation endogène par densification de l'espace dont le 'colon' a pu bénéficier.

Mais la volonté politique ne suffit pas à expliquer le phénomène d'extension de l'espace habité, sinon comment comprendre le morcellement prononcé des

lots d'habitation de Dao Xa durant l'époque collectiviste, alors qu'il existait des terrains accessibles, distribués par la coopérative. Si le fait que les ressources en terres de rizières sont comptées, peut apporter un début de réponse, cette raison ne suffit pas dans la mesure où le quartier Ouest, zone basse aux nombreuses mares, pouvait constituer une aire d'extension de l'habitat non concurrentielle. Nous pensons que les pratiques des agriculteurs concourent avant tout à ne pas s'éloigner du lieu de résidence de leur parents, par attachement à leur village mais également à la maison. Le culte aux ascendants et l'entretien de l'autel qui leurs est destiné, sont des éléments significatifs de cet attachement, mais une étude spécifique serait nécessaire. Le départ sera initié dès lors qu'il y aura saturation de l'espace habité morcelé ou que la personne fera partie d'un petit lignage dans le village. La logique d'installation des fils, voire des filles, auprès de soi et d'alliance matrimoniale avec des voisins, vise à conserver l'espace habité des ascendants dans son intégrité, ou même à l'étendre par alliance matrimoniale. Chacun cherche à maintenir son habitat au village même si la diversification actuelle des activités pousse certains chefs d'exploitation à quitter leur foyer toute une partie de l'année. Cette pratique exclut toute personne extérieure qui désirerait s'installer dans le village sans lien de parenté existant ou créé pour l'occasion. La deuxième étape, d'intensification, apparaît donc à terme génératrice de la première, colonisatrice, dans la mesure où le contrôle lignager est efficace et stable. Il s'opère au final une alternance entre mouvement vers l'extérieur et période de densification, dont les caractéristiques et les déterminants permettent tout à la fois de les qualifier respectivement d'étapes exogène et endogène de colonisation du milieu.

La question restant en suspens est de connaître les bénéficiaires des opportunités permettant de changer de lieu d'habitation. L'exemple des nouveaux quartiers de Dao Xa montre qu'il s'agissait ici dans un premier temps de personnes ayant peu de ressources, mal représentées dans le village pré-révolutionnaire, tel le lignage Le Van. C'est apparemment également le cas pour les foyers qui partent s'installer sur les fronts pionniers (Hardy 1996). Cela reste à être démontré pour les nouveaux quartiers commerçants qui se créent actuellement le long des routes. L'usufruit du lot d'habitation est en effet vendu par les autorités locales des communes et du district, ce qui exclut de fait les personnes sans ressources financières ni relations politiques. Une logique économique, liée à la possibilité de développer une activité commerciale, est présente dans ce cas précis. Elle permet de nuancer l'idée que seuls les foyers les plus démunis cherchent à sortir du village, mais confirme l'idée que l'on ne quitte le village que pour s'installer dans un endroit vierge d'habitations.

Il est, il est vrai, possible d'opposer à cette hypothèse le fait que les déplacements de population sont contrôlés au Vietnam et qu'il est donc de fait pratiquement impossible de déménager. Afin de tempérer le poids de cet argument, il nous semble important de rappeler que ce contrôle existait déjà localement

avant l'époque communiste. Chaque village contrôlait en effet sa population et évitait d'introduire des étrangers en son sein. Le coutumier villageois fixait les règles d'acceptation d'une personne extérieure dans le village, de sa participation aux associations locales, *giap* et *dinh*, qui conditionnaient sa contribution à la vie sociale et politique du village (Krowolski & Nguyen Khac Tung 1996). Les mariages faisaient également l'objet d'un contrôle par le versement d'une somme d'argent, le *cheo*, dont le montant était plus élevé si la future épouse était d'origine extérieure au village. Ces raisons font que plus qu'une conséquence de la politique post-révolutionnaire de contrôle, les faibles déplacements entre zones habitées nous semblent résulter de pratiques sociales, toujours actives, propres à la société nord-vietnamienne. Cette idée nous conduit, pour finir, à réfléchir à la question d'actualité au Nord-Vietnam, concernant la non apparition d'un exode rural prononcé vers les cités. Ce phénomène n'est-il pas dû au fait que pour pouvoir partir en ville, ou ailleurs dans un espace habité, il est socialement nécessaire d'y avoir un lien familial direct ou d'alliance, sans lequel il n'est pas possible de se faire accepter?

## Notes

- 1 Ingénieur agronome, GRET, Programme Fleuve Rouge, Hanoi.
- 2 Sociologue, Institut National de Sociologie, Programme Fleuve Rouge, Hanoi.
- 3 Nous ne possédons pas les données de population de 1955. Celles de 1945 font état de quarante foyers pour deux cent habitants, puis, à la collectivisation de 1958, soixante quatorze foyers pour trois cent deux habitants.

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## Work versus education?

### An empirical study of rural education in a transitional economy of Vietnam

NGUYEN VAN CHINH

‘Whether Vietnam can become glorious, whether the Vietnamese people can stand as honourable equals to the powers in the five continents, all depend largely on your efforts in learning’.  
Ho Chi Minh 1945<sup>1</sup>

‘Vietnam is and has always been one of the most literary civilisations on the face of the planet’ (Woodside 1976: 2). Although this may sound a bit far-fetched, Alexander Woodside’s statement is arguably understandable. Shortly after gaining independence from French colonialism, the new State of Vietnam immediately embarked upon an ambitious campaign to combat hunger and illiteracy. Most probably, this campaign met the aspirations of the masses for an improvement of their cultural life at the time – after having been under French rule for almost a century (which had severely curtailed educational developments). Prior to 1945, less than 10 percent of the population has been estimated to be literate. Some forty years later after the beginning of the anti-illiteracy movement, 88 percent of the population is considered to be literate (an estimation of UNICEF 1990: 136). This is without a doubt a remarkable achievement in mass education.<sup>2</sup> However, nowadays we are witnessing a severe crisis in the educational field which has been brought about by a great socio-economic crisis in the country. Available information on the current state of affairs in educational matters reveals that the school dropout rate varies from 10 percent to 30 percent annually, depending on the levels of schooling and on the geographical areas. In some provinces, particularly, in remote areas of the countryside, the dropout rate is even higher, from 40 to 80 percent of class enrolment. On top of this the system of public crèches and kindergartens seem to have almost completely disappeared in many areas. Worse still, thousands of members of the teaching staff also seem to have left school for other jobs (Ministry of Education and Training [MOET]: 1992: 11). This abnormal state of education is considered ‘an unstable borderline between status quo and down grading’ (Hoang Tuy 1996: 3). In some recent reports, a number of causes have been suggested. The first and foremost is to be found in the growing economic difficulties of large segments of the population and the lack of concern on the part of the State.

Another factor is the school curriculum which is unsuitable to the practical demands of everyday life (Nguyen Trong Bao 1991: 5-7; Tran Van Tung 1996: 3). Among the reasons for the decline, lack of pupils' efforts and enthusiasm for learning are mentioned (Truong Xuan 1989: 4; Pham Tat Dong 1991: 17-19). The situation has caught the attention of the country's leadership:

There exists a decline of morality and a vagueness of ideology among a number of pupils and students. In pursuing a materialistic way of life, they lack the will to lead a virtuous life for their own good and the good of their country (CPV 1997: 24).

Less attention has been paid to the question whether these changes of the economic system, labour market demands and children's involvement in work had any impact upon the education system as a whole. Therefore, arguments such as 'difficulties' and 'pupil's efforts in study' do not seem convincing if we look back at the long development of public education in Vietnam since its independence from the French. The fact is that economic hardship is anything but new to the Vietnamese and that at the present Vietnam remains one of twenty poorest countries of the world (Marr 1988). It seems the situation is even worse nowadays than it was during the war against the Americans. Even under these harsh wartime conditions mass education seems to have developed quite adequately. Comparative studies on public education indicate that other countries in Asia which bear similarities with Vietnam (India, China, Korea, etc.), have managed to develop their mass education under even more difficult economic circumstances (Weiner 1991).

Both the empirical data based on research done on the village level (Nguyen Van Chinh 1997) and the data the preliminary nation-wide survey by MOLISA (1995) provided, indicate the increasing trend of children's involvement in economic activities, pointing out that their earnings were, in many cases, not just a supplement but an important source of household's incomes. Naturally, the question can be raised as to whether the intensive participation of children in work does in fact prevent them from schooling? It is true that almost all drop-outs join in the labour market in one form or another, at home, on the farm or elsewhere. However, it is not easy to draw the conclusion that children were unable to go to school, because of their involvement in the labour market. Further research should address not only children's work but also the attitudes of children and their parents vis-à-vis the education system and, on a wider context, general public opinion towards education.

Previously, I have pointed out that the high dropout rate at early ages might be attributed to the inappropriate school curricula which did not meet the realistic needs of the learners. From a 'functionalist' point of view one would expect that the school should be able to provide the necessary technical skills for the pupils. This functionalism has underlined, at least in theory, past policies on

education in Vietnam, to the effect that most discussions and educational reforms in this country for more than 40 years now have been aimed at 'integrating theory and practice, theory and productive labour' in the school system.<sup>3</sup> This guideline of education has not, however, been applied faithfully in the school system as admitted by the Party itself (CPV 1997: 26). The fact remains that in everyday school life, 'the years of childhood are also seen as being primarily a time of study, i.e., theory' (Rubin 1988: 46). This is in line with historical comparative studies on world-wide education, which suggest that 'the content of most modern education is not very practical, education attainment correlates poorly with work performance', and 'schooling does not supply specific technical skills' (Green 1990: 38).

Another approach to explain the vagaries in school enrolment is to study the attitudes and motivations of both parents and pupils regarding education. Negative attitudes and a low level of motivation would not only lead to a drop in school enrolment but also lower the quality of education as well (Pham Tat Dong 1991; CPV 1997). Such an approach, in my view, does not seem to reflect fully the nature of the educational situation because it does not take into account the social aspects of education.

In reality, it is hard to say whether or not the demands for education are decreasing, if we consider both the private and the public demands. Historically, the Vietnamese can look back on a long tradition of deference to educational ethics (*ton su trong dao*), where 'education retains tremendous prestige' and 'those among them who memorise large quantities of data, achieve top marks, and receive diplomas or degrees, will be honoured with high social status' (Marr 1996: 19). Recent changes in the economic system have at present created a wealth of opportunities for higher educated graduates. After years of warfare the country had to be reconstructed and industrialised. So Vietnam was in need of a great number of well-trained workers. This explains why the State was very much in favor of the creation of a sound educational system. The State was of course the first beneficiary of such a system. Theoretically the thirst for education should have remained very much the same under the present circumstances or should even have become bigger.

The problem is how can one explain the reverse trend in the development of education in Vietnam during the last decade? This question was uppermost in my mind during my field research in Giao village. At the beginning, I was inclined to think that the intensive involvement of children in economic activities was one of the main reasons behind their leaving school at an early age. Therefore it came as a total surprise when many pupils and their parents told me that it was not work but the depressing state of the educational facilities that made young children to leave school for good. As a consequence, I had to revise my research strategy, trying to look into the dynamic linkages between the child, the State and socio-economic changes in order to be able to see