

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Before the 19th century when the nations of the West began to show an interest in Viet-Nam as an abundant source of manpower and natural resources to be exploited, the Vietnamese never considered government service as a profession with all its greatness and its servitude.

They also went to school, also passed examinations to become mandarins, but, no matter how high they were on the administrative ladder, they always strived to keep the Confucian temperament, adopting an "if I don't like it, I can always resign, and teach school" attitude.

That is why the Vietnamese governmental system did not have that continuity which characterizes the efficient administrative organizations in today's modern nations.

The traditional and uncompromising Confucian way of life, the system of education based on diplomas which were considered as an end rather than as a means of self-promotion, and their chauvinistic attitude gave the Vietnamese an erroneous conception of the outside world which, during the 19th century, consisted of the nations of the West. The same factors made them ignore the West's determination to conquer Asia to control the Asian market and lay the basis for the development of its economic and commercial interests.

For this reason the meeting of East and West, which should have brought to Asia the advantages of the industrial Revolution, resulted instead into a clash of thoughts, customs, and cultures, and gradually took on a military and political character.

As far as Vietnam was concerned, during the second half of the 19th century, the French took advantage of the disunity in the imperial court and the conservatism of the people to come to Vietnam and stay here for nearly a century ~~a century~~. One cannot blame anybody in particular for having lost Vietnam. The blame rests entirely on the Vietnamese, for not having understood that swords and spears could not stand up against guns and cannons, that an

...economic system entirely based on agriculture using primitive methods could not compete with the industrial economy of the West. The Vietnamese are to be blamed for not knowing that, in order to safeguard the nation, the government must have the people behind it, and that, in order to have the people's support, the government must be a government of the people, by the people and for the people.

Such was the situation before the French domination. Under the French it was no better. Because they wanted to establish permanent economic and financial foundations, the French colonialists used all kinds of maneuvers to control the Colonial Administration. Thus was born the French policy of obscurantism. No matter how intelligent, hard-working the Vietnamese were, they were only given an education sufficient for them to understand the orders of the French masters and were never given responsible work. Partly because of this policy, most of the Vietnamese civil servants did nothing. The best they could do was to show up at the office, and then, when the boss was not there, they read the papers, went out for a bowl of Chinese soup, played games, or did other private chores. They considered the work at the office as being somebody else's to be done only when absolutely necessary. This indifference gradually bred irresponsibility, apathy and "buck passing". Because they were used to being paid by the government to take care of their own business, these civil servants gradually learned to spend public funds for their own needs, and indulged in graft.

And what was worse, young intellectuals, who learned a few things about the material aspect of the Western civilization, joined the civil service, but did not understand that, in that transitional period, their duty was to develop a new spirit of service to the public and set an example for the future generations. Instead, they used their influence to serve their own, or their family's interests, and thus created a special class of civil servants entirely divorced from the people.

Fortunately, the Vietnamese society has a solid four thousand year-old foundation which could not easily be destroyed in a few decades. Men of good will were always looking forward.../3

...to an opportunity to recover the national sovereignty and to reform the country. They also understood that, in this world which grows everyday smaller, the Vietnamese have to keep in pace with the advances of history in every field, if they are to survive as a free and independent people.

But the realization of such an ambition is conditioned by a few factors. And the most important one is a governmental system in which everyone clearly understands his duties, and has all the necessary qualifications for the job he holds; a system in which everyone has the clear conception that a government employee is not the master, but the servant of the people.

The President of the Republic has understood better than anyone else the need for a sound administrative system based on the people. For this reason the President has invited a group of experts from the Michigan State University to come to Viet-Nam and help re-organize the Vietnamese administrative system to make it more suitable to the needs of a free nation, more suitable to the social, historical and cultural foundations which took the Vietnamese centuries to build up.

The lecture and discussion series organized at the Saigon City Hall in May and June of 1956 is one of the many commendable achievements of this group of people of good will. The lectures were attended by a large audience made up with high ranking Vietnamese civil servants.

We put these lectures in book form with the hope of contributing a small part *to* the peaceful revolution now going on in Vietnam for the establishment of freedom and justice.

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