

ADDRESS OF THE
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM
AT MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

15 May 1957



Governor Williams, President Hannah, Members of the State Board of Agriculture, Members of the University, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am deeply moved to have received from the Michigan State University this honorary doctorate. I hope you will not regard it as presumptuous on my part if I say that this occasion is in a sense a "home-coming" for me -- a very pleasant and warming "home-coming." For it was only four years ago that I last visited this campus, and though I was at that time a voluntary political exile from my own country, you received me with the same generosity, courtesy, and human understanding that you show me today, and which I have come to associate with Michigan State University.

When last I was here, it was as a Consultant to the Governmental Research Bureau of your Department of Political Science. And the association which we enjoyed during that period has, as you are all surely aware, blossomed into a relationship of great scope and tremendous importance to my government and my people. I should like to take this opportunity to express to you my personal appreciation for the splendid work your Vietnam Advisory Group is doing in my country in the fields of governmental and police administration. On behalf of my government also, let me express our

gratitude for your successful efforts. I hope we may have the advantage of your friendship and assistance for many years to come.

Much water has passed under the bridge since 1953. At that time Vietnam was still a French colony. Our land was wracked from end to end by bloody warfare which took the lives of tens of thousands of our young men and women, turned brother against brother, and left physical devastation wherever one went. At that time, furthermore, there was confusion in the minds of many as to why and for what ideals we Vietnamese were fighting. Indeed, to most Americans, Vietnam was simply a distant and exotic jungle country which made interesting reading but ^{was} a good place to stay away from.

When I was interviewed here in Lansing at that time, I pointed out that our struggle in Vietnam was a fight for our freedom, for the right to develop our personalities as human beings, for the chance to show the world that our culture and our traditions -- which date back some three thousand years -- are viable in a twentieth century world. I tried to make it clear that we were not fighting for Communism, as a torrent of well-prepared alien propaganda continued to insinuate to the world, but that we were fighting against colonialism -- even as your ancestors fought against it 180 years ago. And I stated that if Viet-Nam achieved its independence, Communism could then be rolled back in Asia.

Permit me the immodesty of saying that time has borne out my prediction. Viet-Nam did gain its independence -- though at the almost unbearable price of having its territory torn in two, with the northern half going to a Vietnamese Communist regime backed by the Chinese and Russian Communists. But in South Viet-Nam -- Free Viet-Nam -- the developments of the three years since the Geneva Agreements split our land have been more than satisfying to us and to our allies of the Free World.

On the economic plane, Free Viet-Nam has managed to more than simply compete with the Communist North. The fact that nearly all the 900,000 Vietnamese who fled to Free Viet-Nam during the months following the Geneva Agreements are today resettled and gainfully employed is eloquent testimony and justification for the faith they showed when they left their homes in the North. Furthermore, the standard of living of all of our citizens in Free Viet-Nam is higher than that of the unfortunates who yet remain under Communist rule.

The Communists in South Viet-Nam at the time of the partition of the country were capable of extending their sway over the entire length of the land. Today, they are simply a nuisance to us. For the march of political events in Free Viet-Nam -- by which I mean the holding of free elections, the writing of a national constitution, the election of a national assembly, in short the creation of a structure of representative government -- has robbed the Communists of one of their

prime weapons. They can no longer claim to speak for the Nationalists of Viet-Nam. The Nationalists now speak for themselves through the duly constituted machinery of government in Free Viet-Nam.

I would be less than honest if I did not point out that if Viet-Nam has been successful in resisting Communist expansion, this has been due in large measure to the effective aid we have received from the Government and people of the United States. American aid has taken the form of such technical cooperation as the MSU program. It has also included considerable assistance in training and equipping our new National Army; and our Army is sufficiently strong and high-spirited today that even though it is outnumbered at least two-to-one by the Red Army of North Viet-Nam, experts are sure it would constitute a strong first line of defense in the event of Communist invasion.

In our refugee evacuation and resettlement program aid from the United States has amounted to some ninety-four million dollars over the past 30 months, and this sum of money was perhaps the decisive factor in enabling us to carry out our plans for assimilating our compatriots from the North into our body politic. I am aware that ninety-four million dollars is a good deal of money, but I wish to assure you that it has been well invested. It has meant that each of our 900,000 refugees has been given a new house, water buffalo, clothes, tools, and life at a cost of approximately \$100. I can assure you furthermore that the return on your investment, in goodwill towards

the United States and in the building of a strong ally on the very front lines of the Free World, will more than balance the initial outlay.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as I have gone from city to city on this visit to the United States, as I have spoken with President Eisenhower and other leaders of your federal government, as I have had occasion to speak with various groups of American citizens, I have been impressed more and more with our community of thought in the political realm. Both of our peoples were until recently isolationist -- you by choice; we by force. Today, my very presence on the campus of this great university is evidence that we now recognize and, perforce, accept the fact that the earth is a single globe, that the barriers of the past are the channels of the present and of the future, that as it has been said, "no man is an island."

Beyond the mere physical disappearance of the elements which formerly made isolation possible, however, there is a more profound unity of concept which we share. Like you Americans, we Vietnamese believe deeply in the importance of the human individual, and in the transcendent character of his spirit. The theme of our Constitution is that the sole object of the State is to protect the fundamental rights of the individual. And we regard our Constitution as the bulwark of our democratic regime. We do not pretend that we have already established in Viet-Nam a perfect Jeffersonian democracy. Nor is such a development likely to occur within the foreseeable

future. But we have constructed the foundation of a democratic society, and on this foundation we intend to build an edifice of which all Vietnamese will be proud.

In concluding these remarks I should like to pay brief tribute to the philosophy which underlies the activities of your University. When President Hannah visited me in Saigon last winter, he spoke eloquently of the land-grant university's philosophy of service to all the people. I was impressed with the basic similarities of the land-grant philosophy to the philosophy of education which was traditional in Viet-Nam for many centuries prior to the coming of the French. Our Vietnamese universities are just now beginning to emerge from the darkness that followed the years of colonialism and civil war. But our entire educational system, from elementary school to graduate programs, is once more based on the concept -- well expressed in one of your Michigan State essays -- that the youth of our land should be "instructed so that they may develop an understanding and acceptance of their responsibilities both as individuals and as members of a democratic society."

We trust that the years to come will see our community of interest grow and flourish, that the community of learning will lead us forward into a future of cooperation and understanding, and that the community of free men will prosper.

Thank you.