

Preliminary Outline for: "The Myths and  
Reactions in Vietnam

My main interest in this research is in the changes of power and legitimacy that occur in local governments as national economic and political development occur. I expect the study to shed light on the relationship between local leadership and organization on one hand, and national identification and support on the other. Although my focus here is on Vietnam, I am drawing some comparative material from India, China and Southeast Asia.

The study traces the village political system in Vietnam as it has evolved since the imperial days under the impact of colonialism and the political and religious movements of the last forty years. I am trying to relate changes over time in the power and legitimacy of village government to changes in the national government, and the national economy and to changes occurring within the peasantry such as literacy, exposure to markets, political and religious and military mobilization. Along with the historical comparisons I am also comparing current (1966-1971) patterns of village politics and leadership, with special attention to regional and religious differences in political style.

Most specifically the research stresses the impact upon village government of economic change, of the concentration of power and village elections. I am especially interested in the conditions under which effective village leadership emerges and the ways in which focal leaders are able to "induce" participation in local government activities.

Thus, although I am studying both national government and individual social change and attitudes, my main focus is not on these two traditional areas of concern but on how both affect village politics and leadership.

## Prologue: The Most Progressive Hamlet in Vietnam

In the days of Revolutionary Development, a hamlet in one of my villages was widely publicized as the most progressive hamlet in Vietnam. It is one of the most venal villages I have ever seen, rent with vicious conflicts over power, water, graft, religion, and sex. Contrasting this village with an exceptionally well-run village a few miles away, and with a Hoa Hao village in the Delta, serves to illustrate the wide variation in villages within the culture, to introduce important terms, to destroy most simplistic explanations of the war and to lay out the questions I seek to answer in the book.

## Chapter I: The Myth of the Village

The "Myth" refers to attempts by Conservative Nationalists to define (or see) the war as between "tradition" and "revolution." The assumptions behind this are that the old village traditions really were satisfying to all, and that with the French gone from Vietnam there was no hindrance to returning to essentially an old style of village life. In fact, to peasants, the choice was not between tradition and revolution, but between "half a revolution" and a whole revolution.

Drawing on the work of Geertz--Ritual Social Change and Form and Variation; Wolf--Closed Corporate Communities; Gallin on Taiwan; and Paul Friedrich on conflict resolution, a schema is developed to analyze the changes that have occurred in Vietnam.

## II. Up From Feudalism: 1930-1954

We can't understand what has happened in the short period America has been aware of Vietnam without understanding the changes that took place in Vietnam from 1930 on. Taking a short-run view of change, one could argue in many cases that it was reform that opened the way to revolution. Taking a longer perspective, in every case the reform was only a stop-gap.

The analysis of this period covers the impact of the end of the confucian system, the great depression, the growth of population pressure, widespread peasant uprisings in 1930 and the growth of Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, and Viet Minh. It also emphasizes the malleability of culture.

### III. The Ritualistic Village

An extensive analysis of Diem's village strategies and why his fairly sound reforms could not work without political organizations to control the bureaucracy. Emphasize how supposedly meaningful village system was little more than a facade. Interpret and explain religious revival of the '50s (so far totally unnoted) in terms of Hagen's "withdrawal of status respect." Also note that there was lots of grave dissatisfaction with communists, this is essential to show that there really was a "ball game" in Vietnam.

### IV. The Politics of Distrust

In an internal war, a regime not actively striving to widen its support finds it constantly narrowed: the fragmentation of terror as further proof of the hollowness of the village. The tensions between stopping a revolution and preventing a coup. The dynamics of "political judo" where weak institutionalization, specifically the linkage between peasants and bureaucracy, lead to a rather amazing spread of Viet Cong in many areas. The reliance on naked force once institutions for working with society fragment.

### V. Real Democracy: The Heyday of the Viet Cong

The period 1960-61 when the Viet Cong looked like big winners and how they were able to develop their organization and achieve widespread support. The importance of expanded power in the local political system, their style of recruitment--especially young, poor and women.

## VI. "Socialism in One Village": Limits of the GVN

Problems the Viet Cong faced as GVN began to change style after Diem's death and emerging tensions as "the velvet glove is removed from the iron fist." Tensions between "Leninist" party and mass participation. Problems with draft, taxes, repression and regularization, even before massive U.S. bombing of villages and crop destruction. Impossibility of classic ending wherein you shut off countryside and starve cities because U.S. started to supply food to cities.

## VII. The Military Side of Pacification: Power vs. Trumps

How Viet Cong were able to keep up their system so well after they had lost their appeal to the middle peasants (who will be seen to be the swing vote) because the GVN was incapable of attracting support or making their military rightist approach work even when backed by the U.S. due to malintegration of paramilitary and regular armies in contrast to Viet Cong system.

## VIII. Marginal Men: The Territorial Forces

Sociological and political analysis why the GVN military approach couldn't work. Analysis to show that it was possible for military to work if local soldiers were politicized and moved into politics. Discussion of why this was not done more often emphasizing the threat of this strategy to ARVN.

## IX. Protection From Whom?

An unsavory, but necessary chapter on the violence in the countryside, in large part explainable in terms of total lack of local structures capable of controlling ARVN, U.S. and Koreans.

Why Revolutionary Development program was a hoax because it simply further delegitimized local leaders and did nothing for institutional development.

#### X. The Participant Peasant: The Hoa Hao

An analysis of the Hoa Hao and their communities developed in the face of war. Primary emphasis on participation, communication, welfare and recruitment. Debunk myth of Hoa Hao accommodation and show how Viet Cong fare poorly when someone else mobilizes peasants first. Since the Hoa Hao are my favorite people I'll have to be careful not to lose my balance.

#### XI. Participation, for what? Decentralization and Development

In the aftermath of the Tet offensive and the GVN's belated moves into the countryside with village elections and local powers for officials what has the effect of the new system been on village government and peasant attitude. (This might end up as two or three chapters). Topics include varieties of village leadership; the emperor, the bureaucrat and the mobilizer; reestablishing the social contract--the extent to which a good politician can keep peace when large numbers of people (15% or so) still support the Viet Cong; the changed role of ritualism and the Cult Committee; and the dynamics of inducing organization into the village. Emphasize ways in which this is not an example of mobilizing the peasants without a party, because the Viet Cong are to "thank" for much of the GVN success by driving out or at least really intimidating landowners.

#### XII. Conclusion

Economic and social structure changes more rapidly than habits of participation especially when participation is as dangerous as it is in Vietnam. Participation can be induced, however, when political intent is meshed in economic terms. Also given the nature of bureaucracies and regimes in peasant societies, any approach to revolution which emphasizes attrition (destroying the other side), as opposed to building up its own side is bound to be exceptionally bloody. The best way to stop an insurgency is with an alternate insurgency (usually called political parties).