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MEMORANDUM FOR

Robert Scalapino  
Douglas Pike

From Harry Kendall *HK*

Subject: Talk by Huynh Van Khanh at Chulalongkorn University

At Chulalongkorn University on August 21 I met Huynh Van Khanh at the office of Professor Kusuma Snitwongse. He was to give a talk 3-week on his/visit to Vietnam from where he had arrived only the day before. He got lost enroute to her office and arrived ~~only~~ five minutes before the meeting so we had only a brief time to chat. The talk was sponsored by Kusuma's organization, ISIS, and held in the political science faculty's conference room which was filled--about 30-35 persons--with faculty members and embassy representatives--Germany, Japan, U.S., China, and Vietnam. He announced that the talk would be off the record, but there must have been a dozen tape recorders going. He apparently did not notice them until toward the end of his talk when he stopped and asked everyone to erase their tapes. Of course no one did, but there was an embarrassing silence of about 5 minutes before he resumed his talk. I had to leave for an appointment with Dean Kramol before the discussion period. Later I saw him very briefly and invited him to come to Berkeley for a talk. He would welcome an invitation. He sent greetings to both of you.

Lecture: Khan said he had left Vietnam in 1955 and this was the first time he had returned since that time. He had applied for visas on various occasions since 1975 and once he was invited by the Prime Minister only to have the trip cancelled one week before he was to leave. On this occasion he was granted a visa two months after his application. Apparently he was investigated thoroughly, because everywhere he went they knew of his background and his full schedule. He said his adopted

sister/ whom he had <sup>not</sup> notified of his intended visit was called in by the police three days straight and interrogated in depth.

Khanh said entering Vietnam is like entering a police station. There are green uniforms and armed guards everywhere. The people seem poorly fed and malnourished. There are no lights at night, and bicycles on the street look like so many fireflies. Everywhere people complain but there is no opposition, there is no opposition possible. Their every movement is well known to the pervasive security system so there is no way for anyone to organize any opposition. He said crime appears to be at a minimum despite the poverty and he experienced no unhappy incidents such as theft.

Khanh said his purposes in making the trip were three: to observe changes after 33 years, to get his father out, and to write a series of articles on the changes. He had not brought out his father but expected him to come out shortly via the ODP.

Khanh travelled by bus over much of the country and even got to Banmethuot. He was able to converse at length with people on buses. He asked many of them what the government's "renewal" program meant to them, but got generally superficial answers, such as permitting them to visit relatives. Nevertheless, he found the average Vietnamese man-on-the-street able to carry on intelligent economic and political discussions ("better than in Thailand and in Malaysia").

Much of what he reported in his talk is familiar to us, but he did come away with the impression that Vietnam is in a transitional period, that we can expect more change, and that the most important obstruction to social and economic change is the official obsession with security. He said he had given a seminar at an architectural institute in HCM City and was impressed with the pessimism he encountered.

Many of those attending his seminar felt Vietnam is unable to compete with other SEAsian countries such as Thailand and Singapore. The debate now, he said, is security and development. The government has lost the confidence of the people, but if it is able to regain that confidence they will move ahead, "they have to do it." Khanh said one colonel in North Vietnam told him it would take 30 years for Vietnam to move out of its economic doldrums, but he himself felt a bit more optimistic and that it should take no more than five to ten years.

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