

TO: Public Administration Division
FROM: Frank Child
SUBJECT: Research at the NIA

The following discussion of the research situation at the NIA is a preliminary diagnosis rather than a conclusive analysis. The recommendations are tentative, perhaps mutually inconsistent and should not be construed as a definitive policy statement. In short, this is a "working paper" presented for discussion purposes.

The Research Division of the NIA is the largest division in terms of personnel and the smallest division in terms of output. In fairness, several members of the division are part-time members, and the full-time members have teaching and administrative duties. Nevertheless, it appears that the division is essentially a paper organization whose major activities fall outside the field of research. To my knowledge, the only completed research project is that of Mr. Dinh on the subject of Prefectural Administration in Saigon. From time to time, a member of this division or some other division will contribute a short piece to a publication such as the bulletin of Administrative Research; Mr. Chan has talked about a study of the commercial banking system; Mr. Hach has mentioned a study of urbanization problems in Saigon; and the NIA has announced its intention to undertake a rather grandiose study of the Saigon labor force. In addition, a number of other topics have been mentioned as possible subjects for future study. Plans, however, remain plans; it is clear that the division has done very little research and is unlikely to do very much in the near future.

The history of MSU-NIA research efforts is common knowledge. The decision of Hendry, Woodruff, and Hickey to complete their village study without NIA participation followed the frustration of their efforts to include NIA staff. (It is interesting to note that the Research Division of the NIA refers to the Village Study as a successful NIA-MSU project.) Their decision was rationalized on the grounds that a successful research project would

provide the NIA with an example which they, the NIA, would be encouraged to duplicate. Present MSU policy, as I understand it, is to seek once again the participation of NIA personnel in research programs. In fact, it would be preferred that future research be done by the NIA with the role of MSU reduced to that of advising and consulting. Without going through a tedious recital of the events of my own four months experience in this matter, let me simply say that I have learned to appreciate the frustrations encountered by my predecessors and I here report my own failure as an instigator of NIA research. (I still have hopes!)

I believe that the explanation for the low research productivity of the NIA is to be found in three general conditions: (1) certain socio-cultural factors, (2) the internal NIA organization and structure, and (3) the place of the NIA in the GVN structure.

1. I am struck with the infrequency with which the question, "Why?" is asked by our Vietnamese counterparts. With notable exceptions (mostly outside of the NIA) the Vietnamese do not seem to feel an urge or a drive to "get at the facts"--to define a problem clearly, to discover relevant facts, to organize these facts in a fashion which will discover relevant facts, to organize these facts in a fashion which will clarify and perhaps solve the issue? Only rarely does one observe Vietnamese behavior which exemplifies a belief that issues and problems can be illuminated or solved by their own intellectual effort. They seem to lack the Western faith in the existence of an orderly society, if we could but see it, and they lack a faith in their own ability to find that order. In short, there is a lack of a pragmatist and of a positivist tradition in this culture.

This aspect of Vietnamese intellectual attitudes is reinforced by certain features of the French academic tradition under which an intellectual "passes on" information rather than discovers new relationships. Such study as is done is essentially reflective rather than empirical. Their writing consists mostly of essays containing high-flying generalities and their research consists of rehashes of previously published material--a sort of intellectually "cudchewing." (Again there are exceptions to this: at Buu Hoan's outfit at the National Bank and in the office of Vu Van Thai)

There is some evidence and a great deal of hope that careful empirical research on current problems will provide an example to the NIA staff and that they will be tempted to emulate this procedure. One may anticipate that the return of U. S. trained personnel will facilitate a change. Also, the long-term exposure of the society to a growing volume of western literature will have its affect. Thus far, however, it is clear that the Research Division of the NIA continues in the old pattern. It should be noted, this is a problem which probably cannot be attacked frontally. It will take many years to make a dent in deep-seated traditions.

2. Of more immediate concern is the make-up of the NIA faculty. The majority of personnel are part-time people who work full-time elsewhere. These people supplement their regular incomes by teaching a single course at the NIA but their primary allegiance lies somewhere else. The full-time staff member also frequently finds employment outside the NIA, employment which detracts from his NIA work. (The Chief of the Academic Division holds a full-time job at the Faculty of Law as well as a full-time position at the NIA.) In addition, most faculty members have the usual burden of committees, administrative duties, and the usual overhead activities associated with an educational institution. Since research is an easily postponable activity--and one for which the rewards are both unspecified and uncertain--there is a lack of incentive. A lack of incentive, combined with divergent allegiances and a multiplicity of jobs, is a situation hardly conducive to serious or extensive research.

Furthermore, the policies of the NIA contain built-in disincentives for research. Not only can a faculty member supplement his normal income by outside activity either at a government agency or at another teaching institution, he can supplement it by taking on an expanded teaching load at the NIA. In addition, there are other activities which offer financial rewards: writing for various bulletins and case studies which, however desirable in their own right, militate against research activity per se. (Let me hasten to add that Jason has been very judicious, circumspect and ~~restrained~~ in this matter, even to the extent of limiting the rate of expenditure of case study funds. The fact remains, however, that it pays to do case studies - among other things. It does not pay to do research.)

3. The NIA is an agency of GVN and the faculty has civil service status. This may be unfortunate and debilitating

for research. Since the role of government in economic and administrative affairs looms especially large in Viet Nam, the cooperation of governmental agencies is essential for any successful research study. For any important research problem, a member of the NIA must obtain GVN approval. Even if such approval is forthcoming there are numerous obstacles in the path of the researcher who faces fear and mistrust in the government agency which may be involved and whose cooperation is essential. A study of one government agency by another is a difficult situation at best. It may be impossible in an environment in which virtually every important problem involves some government agency or another and in which deficiencies in the present situation are bound to be spotlighted.

The attitude of GVN agencies is somewhat contradictory, but nevertheless discouraging. On the one hand, the prestige of the NIA is rather low so that any particular agency is likely to doubt the ability of the NIA's staff to do productive and creative work. On the other hand they are reluctant to cooperate lest the NIA really discover shortcomings and publish findings which may be construed as critical.

More importantly, it may be doubted that there is a real desire on the part of NIA people to do research. In Viet Nam, under present political conditions, it might be better not to know too much. Even if there were a desire to do research, even if necessary approvals could be obtained, even if cooperation of government agencies could be obtained, any faculty member may think twice before jumping into a study which may lead to embarrassing revelations or controversial conclusions. Given the low status of the NIA and the insecurity of the personnel, it is much easier and perhaps politically wiser to remain ignorant. Why stir up trouble? Why irritate the powers that be? Why make trouble for oneself?

4. To all this may be added an observation that the faculty of the NIA is not notably energetic or competent.

Recommendations:

A. Except under rare and exceptional circumstances the faculty of the NIA should be composed of full-time members. This probably would mean an expansion of the budget because a full-time faculty member may cost more than two or three part-time employees. Furthermore, the salary level at the NIA should be increased to reduce the incentive to take outside employment.

This policy, if implemented, should improve morale, establish some esprit de corps and, for present purposes, would permit if not encourage, faculty research.

B. Research and publication, as well as teaching and administration, should be recognized, explicitly, as a basis for pay increases and promotion. This recommendation would require recognition by the civil service, as well as the NIA.

C. The NIA should be recognized as a major research arm for the GVN. As a matter of high-policy, much governmental research activity should be centralized at the NIA--research should be established as one of the normal, ongoing functions of the NIA. (Certain kinds of research perhaps most kinds, can be done better and more expeditiously within governmental agencies. But certain basic research, long-range studies and many special projects can best be undertaken in an academic environment.) Research should be undertaken on the initiative of the NIA and, hopefully, upon the request of government agencies as well.

In addition, routine procedures should be established for project approval. These procedures should be based upon the presumption of cooperation by various governmental agencies, including access to data and information.

D. The Participant program of MSU-USOM should be expanded to increase the supply of U. S. trained MA's and PhD's. These participants need not necessarily be committed to the NIA, but should provide a general increase in available intellectual resources. These people would provide a cadre of persons oriented toward empirical, policy-oriented research.

E. (Perhaps) the Research Division of the NIA, as a separate entity, should be abandoned, thus diffusing research responsibility. Some sort of coordination of research activity by an administrative officer may be necessary, but the present structure provides a barrier rather than a facility for MSU research contacts.

F. (Perhaps) the NIA should be absorbed by the University of Saigon as the Faculte d'Administration.

Some outside activities

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

VIETNAM ADVISORY GROUP

OFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO : Frank Child
FROM : Jason Finkle
SUBJECT: Paper on Research

DATE : 22 December, 1959

I received your paper on research and I have a few reflections on your reflections. First I would like to tell you that I thought your paper was a genuine contribution in focusing attention on a serious problem. It is much easier to ignore the problem than to come to grips with it. I fully support you in your effort to improve the woeful state of research at the NIA. Furthermore I feel MSU has accumulated sufficient "goodwill" and we can afford to begin using up a little of our reserve.

I fully agree with you that it may not be the best idea for the NIA to establish by fiat a research staff, especially when the research staff shows little propensity to produce research. However, rather than putting the entire staff on full time teaching, I should prefer that the time now allocated for research be distributed among the NIA faculty on a different basis. By that I mean NIA faculty members who propose a research project and outline a time schedule etc., should be rewarded by being freed from part of their teaching load. At the same time I would strongly urge that research efforts be recognized as a valid basis for promotion and pay raises.

As part of your plan to create a more professional atmosphere in the NIA I would seriously consider a move to prevent students from being enrolled full-time in another faculty simultaneously with their enrollment in the NIA. I realize that this might be difficult to accomplish, nevertheless, students at the NIA are subsidized and this could be one of the conditions for their subsidy. Similarly I would suggest that there be placed limitations on the amount of outside teaching and other paid activities undertaken by NIA faculty members.

Actually I believe the NIA has already received a subtle invitation from the Presidency to undertake practical research problems within the framework of the GVN. Sometime back the President of Vietnam issued a directive instructing the NIA to engage in such research and even went so far as to require the various governmental agencies in the GVN to propose worthwhile research projects for the NIA. The NIA has not capitalized on this invitation, although I feel it could be used as the opening wedge for the NIA to immerse itself in studies of agency policies, and at the same time this directive could serve as a shield to protect the NIA from recalcitrant administrators in the GVN.

I am also of the opinion that the seriousness of the
plight of research has reached proportions which warrant a full
scale evaluation and critique by MSU and the NIA.