

September 18, 1958

PERSONAL

TO: Coordinator
FROM: Chief Advisor
SUBJECT: Thong Visit

We are very happy that Vu Quoc Thong appears to be having a successful visit to the United States. You probably do not realize it, but in a way your memorandum of September 12 was just as hilarious as the letters Wes has sent. It arrived at a time when John Dorsey, Len Maynard, and Howard Waltman were in the office, and I read your comments aloud to them. Your comment about the Michigan Avenue handshake was the first of many passages which touched off some very appreciative reactions from the audience. For example, some of the requests he made are so in line with the types of thing we have discussed out here that receiving them from you in return could not help but be amusing. Furthermore, some of the questions about MSUG reveal such a lack of knowledge on his part on what we are actually doing that if not so sad they too would be entirely amusing. Your comment about the manual inspired John Dorsey to tell of a similar incident in Bangkok where Rector Thong located a panacea in the form of a document being prepared there. When he finally was successful in obtaining the document, he would entrust it to no one other than the Vietnamese diplomatic pouch. He left it in Bangkok to be transmitted from the Embassy to the Ministry in Saigon. In spite of all of the precautions it never arrived, and I am sure that it has long since been forgotten.

Be that as it may, I am very glad that you have been able to strike up such a good relationship and that he has been so relaxed.

His desire to see MSU people here on full-time research or teaching indicates a lack of understanding of what we are presently doing in spite of the fact that this has been made clear on many occasions. Nghiem Dang has a pretty good grasp of this, and I might add has been quite frank in his comments to Ed Weidner, John Dorsey, and others

about the difficulty of leadership and communications. Our people have been full-time on research at times when there was absolutely no research defined. Furthermore, while he is talking about full-time teaching people, he does not specify what they would teach. I might add that a full-time teaching load at the Institute is one course, so that in a sense our people have been full-time whenever they taught and all of their other expenditures of energy were overtime. We are presently getting at this problem of underemployment of trained faculty members although it may take some time to convince the actual staff members at the NIA that it is in their country's interest for them to teach more, research more, and generally improve the Institute at something more than a few hours a day pace. The comments about sophistication which you use are particularly appropriate!

I assume that on page 2 you refer ^{once} to Glen having already gone into the question of administrative support, referred to conversation with Thong and not with you. In other words, the word "me" in line 3 of the first full paragraph on page 2 (September 12 memorandum) should be changed to "him." If it, in fact, means that Glen is somewhat negative then I would appreciate a further statement on this so that I can be guided accordingly.

As for the manual, I can see certain value in such a document. I hasten to add, however, that none of the books, articles, or pamphlets on research methodology which we have in the NIA library are being used by Mr. Thong or the members of the "Research Division." The manual as a solution to problems might represent a panacea, I can see, in the eyes of Thong; however, we are getting at the problem in a much sounder way, I believe, by developing some genuine joint research projects rather than the fictitious joint projects of the past. At a certain point in these projects out here, we will be able to develop a manual working with the Vietnamese. I think under these circumstances it would be useful and we would be sure that it would be used.

As far as the research backstopping is concerned, we will assure him that such backstopping already exists within limits. Our library facilities here provide answers to many questions, and we would have to rely on East Lansing for only certain types of thing, such as was the case when Frank Cliffe began to talk to people and acquire materials for the EROPA Center. The problem is not one of backstopping or not having answers to the questions but one of having the research problem defined and the questions asked in a researchable way. I know that you understand all this, and I appreciate your comments both in the memorandum and to Rector Thong.

Rector Thong's interest in the EROPA Center is a good example of questionable judgment, in my opinion. First of all, the Institute

itself is far more important than the Center, and until the Institute's research and documentation program is on a firm basis the EROPA Center here is going to suffer. The first priority therefore should be, in his eyes, the shaping up of a good NIA research and documentation program. When Mr. Chan is in the United States, you will see one of the major problems we face. Second, the EROPA Center will probably be directed by somebody other than Thong. This is speculation, of course, but we understand that whoever directs it will be able to give most of his time to it. Therefore, Thong would not be the director. Furthermore, the EROPA organization itself has not yet been established, and unless the people in Manila start moving it could be a dead duck before it even gets off the ground. There have been no ratifications since the Filipinos have not yet sent out the official constitution. I am sure that pressure will be brought to bear to get the organization going, but at the present time the item of great importance is the NIA, which is already a going concern with its own problems, and not the EROPA Center. Interest in the EROPA Center is great on the part of Thong and Trach and others because they all know that the President himself is keeping his eye on it.

Thong's comment that the Center was apart from the Institute and that therefore MSU was not involved is very peculiar. We expect to be involved in the future as we have been in the past--that is, very intimately. We expect to be able to use a certain amount of our library support funds and others to assist the Vietnamese in getting started on the Center. I am not exactly sure what the implication was of Thong's comment to you.

I think you would be making a mistake if on a "personal basis" you attempted to assist in the fund raising. I am sure you realize that there is no such thing as a "personal basis" when you have the position that you do. Furthermore, in your contacts with the foundations you may be supporting something over which you have no control. Neither your name nor that of MSU could benefit if that were the case. In short, I hope you can stay out of it for the most part until we have a better idea of what the foundation would be buying. We all want to help, but without a director, without a ratified constitution, and without a clear idea of the Government's own level of support for the Center, I cannot see how any of us including the Center would be benefited by becoming too involved with a foundation on specific grant funds. Therefore, I hope that Thong was able to open the doors and establish a good rapport with foundation people so that he or the future director can become specific when the time is appropriate. I do not believe that I am too cautious on this one. Short run gain might well be long run disaster.

I will cable you today to the effect that the amount of money he is seeking is known only to him. Some of the money he needs can be taken care of out of the National budget without any strain. In fact, the Secretary of State at the Presidency, Mr. Thuan, told me that three or four million piasters would be no problem at all. As for the \$51,000, some of this has already been pretty well taken care of by partial commitments made in discussions before he left. I do not know exactly what he is trying to accomplish or obtain at the present time.

RHS/dcm