

November 12, 1959

Mr. Tran Ngoc Phat  
53 Trowbridge Street  
Cambridge 38,  
Massachusetts

Dear Mr. Phat:

Since Elsie's return we have discussed what, if any, means were available to us to alleviate your financial distress. Presumably you have by now received your semi-monthly per diem check.

Unfortunately, there are no additional funds available to us within the limitations of our current contract and ICA regulations for your use in travel or book purchase until after January 1st. In terms of the books you have had to purchase for your courses at Harvard this term, we shall be glad to cover these to the full amount left of the \$150 per year book allowance. This balance is \$33.17. If you wish us to cover the remainder on the deferred payment basis the first of the year, you will subsequently have that much less money to spend for books next year.

As much as I feel your professional interests and development would be served by your attendance at the Pittsburgh meeting of the American Society of Public Administration, your travel funds are exhausted and it is my understanding that ICA audit regulations will not permit a transfer. We will simply have to wait until the first of the year.

Kind regards,

Stanley T. Gabis  
Acting Coordinator

STG:mm

December 2, 1959

Miss Elsie Cunningham  
Participant Program Director  
Viet-Nam Project  
East Lansing, Michigan

Dear Miss Director:

Please find enclosed my statement on the book bill.

And also, I hereby have the honor to request your kindly withdrawing from the Embassy my former application to the Vietnamese government for an extension of my stay here.

I am submitting you my request for preparing an itinerary of my trip from Cambridge back to Viet-Nam, since the time allowed for my mission here will expire by the end of this month.

It would be helpful if you call me back to East Lansing by December the 15th inst., so that I shall have time to do the necessary preparation such as, sending books, notifying my family and my employing agency of my return, etc...

Looking forward to receiving as soon as possible your itinerary, may I take this opportunity to express my sincere and deep gratefulness to MSUG in Saigon, MSU, ICA and Viet-Nam Project for the kind opportunity and the nice treatment I have been given to come and to study in this friendly country. And to you and especially all Viet-Nam Project management and staff, I am much obliged for many kinds of service you have spontaneously accomplished for me in the past.

It is my guess that I have learnt many useful things while in the United States so far. Copy of my activity report destined to my government will be submitted to you before I leave for Viet-Nam.

Sincerely yours,

Tran Ngoc Phat



HARVARD UNIVERSITY  
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

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*Tran Ngoc Phat*  
Tran Ngoc Phat



HARVARD UNIVERSITY  
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

December 7, 1959

Dr. Stanley T. Gabis  
Acting Coordinator  
Viet-Nam Project  
East Lansing, Michigan



Dear Dr. Gabis:

Thank you for your recent words of encouragement. In order to avoid the cost of another toll call, this letter is to supplement the former request of Dec. 3 inst. which was addressed to Miss Elsie Cunningham, Director of Administrative Affairs.

I would be grateful to you if you could get me back to East Lansing by December 20, 1959, so that I have time to prepare for my departure in destination of Viet-Nam. As Miss Elsie Cunningham had clearly specified, my stay here is good only for one year, i.e. until January 2, 1960, the date of expiration of my mission as stated in the decree sending me overhere. Due to the interest I have in pursuing my study, at her suggestion, I have submitted a request for extension of my stay; but now, I have found myself physically and mentally so depressed--in part because of homesickness, I guess--, that it is difficult for me to study anymore. On the other hand, as a measure of economy --an important concern to Miss Cunningham--, a more useful time would result from my resuming my work for the government of Viet-Nam.

I know I owe a lot from you and from other members--past and present--of Viet-Nam Project, and this is not a way to pay back by not asking for another period of study, thus disappointing you and other Professors who have so generously trusted and supported me. But studyship is a hard enterprise and only some privileged and gifted persons can afford a high degree of learning; I have tried and failed. So please disregard my request for extension and accept my humble above mentioned request for coming back. With what I have learnt I hope to benefit my dear people.

Sincerely indebted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tran Ngoc Phat".

P.S. May I extend to you and Mrs. Gabis as well as all members of your dear family my sincere wishes for a very Christmas and a happy New Year.

ZNP

December 8, 1959

Mr. Tran Ngoc Phat  
53 Trowbridge Street  
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Dear Mr. Phat:

Needless to say, your decision to return to Vietnam at this point in your graduate work is very unhappy news for those of us on the Project who hoped that you would get your degree and assume your position as a full fledged faculty member of the National Institute of Administration.

I can well understand that from time to time irritations may arise which, in the face of heavy academic responsibilities, might assume a magnitude far out of proportion. If this is the case, I can only encourage you to concentrate on your major objective. It is difficult for me to understand why you allow these minor questions to upset you. As an example, you make an issue over your extension which is merely a matter of routine. I recognize that the reduction of per diems was done rather abruptly, and I am very sorry that this happened, but all we could do was follow instructions. Miss Cunningham informs me that notification of this change went out last September. As for such matters as signing for books, you will certainly appreciate that some controls are necessary, and that this is a small price to pay in contrast to the benefits received.

What concerns me more than anything else is that the issues you have raised seem to me so superficial that I cannot help but feel there are deeper forces at work. When an American scholar undertakes to obtain his Ph. D. the incentive is quite clear-cut. It usually consists of two parts: to get a decent post in academic life and to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to pursue scholarly research. These two factors are usually adequate to provide the motivation necessary to overcome the difficulties which everyone encounters in getting a degree. My question is how does this relate to your situation? It was my understanding that you had planned a career in the NIA. Can you have a satisfactory career there without your Ph. D.? If you do go back to Vietnam without your degree have you decided not to go into academic life?

You are perfectly aware that you were chosen to come to this country to receive advance training as part of the projected program of the NIA. Recent

reports from Saigon indicate that the NIA is making very good progress in the development of its program. Plans are now on foot to add a business management curriculum to the program. A masters program in public administration may be developed. It would seem to me that you would have the possibility of a remarkably fine career in the NIA providing you returned with your doctorate. I want to counsel you as earnestly as I can that you evaluate your present situation very carefully. Furthermore, you ought to avoid magnifying minor frustrations to the point where your capacity to work is endangered.

I am well aware that it may be fruitless to give advice in matters of this sort. It is especially questionable whether advice should be offered where none has been solicited. However, I felt that I should let you know how I feel about this. It is certainly up to you to make the final decision.

In any event, you understand that if you return to Vietnam it will take time to work out the details of your return. We think it best here that you complete your semester at Harvard and then return to East Lansing. We are asking all of the doctoral students to return to East Lansing the latter part of January in order to review their program. Miss Cunningham will work out the exact dates.

In our recent phone call I strongly recommended that you discuss your situation fully and frankly with your advisor, Professor Emerson. I now repeat the same recommendation and urge you to do this as soon as possible. I think you may find this very helpful.

Do not hesitate to write to me if any further questions arise.

Kind regards,

Stanley T. Gabis  
Acting Coordinator

STG/ap

cc:  Professor Musolf, Chief Advisor, MSUG  
Miss Cunningham

Phat's file



December 18, 1959

Mr. Tran Ngoc Phat  
53 Trowbridge Street  
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Dear Mr. Phat:

My wife and I received your Christmas card and we were both pleased that you remember us. I hope your Christmas too will be very joyful. This is the time of year when I most wish I were back in the United States with my family. However, the Vietnamese people have been very warm and friendly and I am beginning to consider Saigon a second home.

These past four months have been very interesting — they have been facinating! I have replaced Dr. Montgomery in the Case Development Program but my job encompasses many other matters. It is impossible for me to describe in detail what I do because each day seems to bring something new. What makes it even more exciting is that I feel that I am in the middle of significant developments in a new nation which has a great future. As a Professor in the United States I was one of thousands who had but the slightest impact on the shape of public affairs. As a Professor in Vietnam, I am one of a handful and am therefore able to participate in the making of a nation. I may be exaggerating my role but at least this is how I feel. Every day I can sense the changes, the growth, and the progress of Vietnam. I am sure you will find many things to please you here when you return.

I feel hesitant to bring up a personal matter, but in all sincerity I do so as a friend. I hope you will not consider me to be intruding in your personal life. It concerns the question of your continuing to work for the PH.D. degree. I know nothing of your problems but I would like to relate a few of my own during the years when I was pursuing my doctorate. I found my-

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Mr. Tran Ngoc Phat  
December 18, 1959  
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self with continuous financial problems, I felt eternally frustrated, and it appeared to be an endless process. I was a graduate student of the University of Michigan. In 1952 I applied for a job with a Government agency and was appointed to the position. At the last minute I decided to continue with my studies. Again in 1953 I received an offer from the Ford Motor Corporation in their Price Research Division. The salary was superb and it appeared to be a good opportunity for me to enter the executive world of business. After much hesitation I decided to forego the opportunity of becoming a business executive and remain in school. These were only two of the more dramatic moments of hesitation I felt. There were others.

Now that I have my PH.D., I feel free to say that the suffering I endured in graduate school was ultimately worth it. While I do not think the PH.D. is the ultimate purpose of life I feel it has enabled me to move in a world of scholars and men of affairs and to have a thoroughly interesting professional career. I also know that I will always be able to have an interesting position whether I teach in a University (my first love is teaching) or serve in the government. Before receiving my degree I was filled with doubts about the wisdom of the path I had chosen. Since receiving it I have never doubted for a moment that it was the wisest choice I have ever made.

Please do not look upon what I have said as the pious preaching of a self satisfied man. My words are simply expressions of what I believe, and I feel they are worth conveying to you. Whatever choice you make you have my best wishes.

Sincerely,

Jason L. Finkle

JLF:kf