VIETNAM'S Economic Policy SINCE 1975

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Contents

"La première loi qui s'impose à l'historien est de ne rien oser dire de faux, la seconde d'oser dire tout ce qui est vrai"

CICERON, *DE ORATORE*

Preface

The present work is the result of my collection of data and reflections on Socialist Vietnam's economy since I left the country in late 1984 after spending sixteen years in Hanoi and nine years in Ho Chi Minh City after "Liberation".

Gathering material and particularly statistical data for this book was indeed a hard and time-consuming task, because there were no readily available Vietnamese documents and reference books in libraries or even specific research centres. Very often, I had to read interminable annual reports of Vietnamese leaders to find some useful figures or interesting remarks. As for articles written by Vietnamese economists and published in the journal *Nghien Cuu Kinh Te* (Economic Research) they were most of the time insipid because their aim was to demonstrate, at least until 1985, the *a priori* correctness of the Party's economic policy. However, since 1986–87 this journal began to disclose from time to time some interesting figures and facts about the Vietnamese economy, but at the same time it was difficult to find issues of this journal in most of the libraries in the West which usually subscribed to it.

Thus, searching for Vietnamese statistical data, which belonged to the domain of pathological secrecy, was a very frustrating task.

The General Statistical Office in Hanoi published two series of statistics: one for public purposes, entitled *So Lieu Thong Ke* (Statistical Data), and one "top secret" (*Tai Lieu Toi Mat*) meant for high-ranking cadres, entitled *Nien Giam Thong Ke* (Statistical Yearbook). Generally, the former was patchy and incomplete whereas the latter was more systematic and comprehensive. Nevertheless, one could not find in the latter figures concerning the state budget or foreign aid, which were (and still are) ultra-secret. However, since 1987, the *Statistical Yearbook* has been available for public consumption although some sensitive tables contained in it previously have now been deleted! The publication of these statistics was (and is) generally very late, often with a lag of two or three years.

In this book, as much as possible, the *Statistical Yearbook* has been used instead of the *Statistical Data*. However, the reader should consider all official data with great reserve. For even the Council of Ministers has warned, in their Instruction No 295/CT (14 November 1983) that many units of production and branches have given inadequate statistics. Worse still, some of them deliberately gave false statistics in order to demonstrate "achievements" (see the journal *Thong Ke*, no. 12 [Hanoi, 1983], p. 1, and no. 8 [1987], p. 1). The Party newspaper has been reiterating time and again the necessity to improve the overall quality of statistics and the end of false reports (*Nhan Dan*, 22 February and 12 September 1985; 15 August and 6 December 1986; 24 May 1988). In an unusual article published in its 24 February 1988 issue, this newspaper even disclosed five categories of false statistics with a view to highlighting "achievements".

One of the Vietnamese leaders, Vo Van Kiet, complained that "false statistics lead to wrong policies" (*Nhan Dan*, 21 February 1986). As for Le Duc Tho, he warned that "if reports are false, and statistics erroneous, they become even more dangerous" (*Tap Chi Cong San*, no. 5 [1986], p. 20) for they mislead the Party leadership. In brief, even Party leaders have admitted that they were (and are) mystified by their own mystification!

Primary Vietnamese sources are mainly used in this book, including unpublished Party and government material. The book is divided into four chapters. In chapter 1 I try to analyse and assess

the legacy of the Stalinist-Maoist developmental model of North Vietnam during the 1955-75 period. I would like to warn students of Vietnamese affairs that the present assessment supersedes what I had written in my earlier book *Croissance Economique de la Republique du Vietnam 1945-65* (Hanoi: ELE, 1967), and other articles on the Vietnamese economy published in Vietnam as well as in the Soviet Union and France during the years 1960-80. For these publications obviously were written under conditions in which, paraphrasing Shakespeare in *King Lear,* I had to write not what I felt but what I had to write. There were at that time, besides self-censorship, several layers of censorship made by the Party and government machinery including that of the Economic Department of the Ministry of Public Security. I was asked to cut large passages of my works which were not palatable to the Vietnamese authorities and to present a rosy economic picture.

In chapter 2, I analyse the consequences of the "Northernization" of South Vietnam after a precipitate "reunification" and the overhasty "socialist transformation" in agriculture and industry during the Second Five-Year Plan (FYP) (1976-80).

In chapter 3, I analyse the performance of the Third FYP (1981-85) during which Vietnam had to implement, after the Chinese attack in February 1979, " two strategic tasks" (instead of one before), namely, "building socialism and defending the socialist homeland".

In the last chapter, I analyse the changed road to development effected by the new Secretary-General Nguyen Van Linh since his accession to supreme power at the Sixth Party Congress (December 1986). His policy is, in fact, a dialectical unity of continuity *and* change (or "renovation" as he put it). It is worth noting, however, that while advocating economic "renovation", Linh also warns that it should remain "within the realm of socialism" and only "aim at its better attainment". This incipient "renovation" process covers not only the internal but also external aspects of the Communist Party of Vietnam's (CPV) economic policy during the Fourth FYP (1986-90).

In the general conclusion I briefly recall great turning points in the economic history of Vietnam since its forced reunification,

and try to extract the human significance of its tumultuous economic experience.

I am indebted to Pierre Brocheux, Marie-Agnes Crosnier, Nguyen Thi Dieu, Francoise Direr, Fumio Goto, Ngo Manh Lan, Edith Lhomel, Lam Thanh Liem, Vo Hoang Mai, David Marr, Tadashi Mio, Tsutomu Murano, Nguyen Duc Nhuan, Truong Quang, Lewis Stern, Ikuo Takeuchi, Carlyle Thayer, and Richard Vokes, for sending me useful materials or copies of their own articles from Australia, England, France, Holland, Japan and the USA at various times. I profited greatly from discussions with colleagues and friends such as Georges Boudarel, Victor Funnell, Tetsusaburo Kimura, John Kleinen, Tadashi Mio, Nguyen Thanh Nha, Bui Xuan Quang, Ton That Thien, Jayne Werner, and Christine White.

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