

## The Fall of Vietnam: A South Vietnamese Perspective \*

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More than ten years have elapsed since South Vietnam fell to Communism in April 1975. As the Communists extended their power to the whole country, many people thought that this would be a blessing for the people of Vietnam: with a country finally reunified, under a ~~stable~~ government believed to be incorruptible, efficient and caring for the interests of the people, and above all with peace, it was expected that Vietnam would make very fast progress and its people would be prosperous and happy. Those expectations were unfounded. Very soon, it became clear that the communist government was corrupt, incompetent, totally unconcerned about the interests of the people, and, in addition, war addicted and imperialistic. The people became poorer and poorer every day, and worst of all, the country's young men were sent again into war, this time not to defend the country against any foreign power, but to invade weaker neighbours, all in the name of proletarian internationalism.

People have been asking why, and in recent years there has been a renewed interest in Vietnam, particularly in the United States. Many of the beliefs which had led to pressure on the American government to disengage from South Vietnam or, to put it another way, to abandon Vietnam to its fate, have been invalidated by facts coming from a Vietnam ruled totally by Communists, and new answers to old questions are being sought. Two of these questions are: why did Vietnam fall to Communism? And should South Vietnam have been allowed to fall?

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\*Talk given at the Institute of International Relations, Taipei, on June 27, 1986.

to Communism? The first question is of an academic nature; it is addressed specially to a historian. The second is political, or personal; it is addressed to those directly involved, in particular Americans or South Vietnamese, or to their friends. It is therefore both as historian and South Vietnamese that I shall try to answer those two questions. The answers to the first will therefore be objective. The answers to the second will be necessarily subjective.

My answer to the first question will surely cause surprise. Vietnam did not fall to Communism. It was simply given away, first by France, and then by the United States. The Communists did not really win Vietnam. They simply picked it up because France, then the United States, in effect, told them: "here, take it!" Let me try to explain this apparent paradox. I will do it, first by asking a basic question: what really was the Vietnam war about? In other words, what was the basic nature of the Vietnam war?

If we read the literature about Vietnam, and it is very abundant, particularly before 1975, we shall find, in many variations, two main answers:

1) The Vietnam war was a war of national independence, waged by the Vietnamese against colonialism or imperialism; it was an anti-colonial war, for the emancipation of a colonial people;

2) The Vietnam war was a war waged by the United States for the preservation of South Vietnam as an important strategic position in its world wide conflict with the Soviet Union.

Both answers are wrong. The right answers are given by the Vietnamese communists themselves. These answers are to be found in the very abundant publications put out by Hanoi since 1975. These publications are quite candid. They tell us what the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) had tried to do, how and why.

What we have tried to do, said the leaders of the CPV, was:

1) establish socialism--i.e., proletarian dictatorship -- on a world scale, in Vietnam and throughout the world;

2) defeat American imperialism, so that it would not dare repeat the Vietnam experience anywhere else in the world.

These are two major themes which, in many variations, run through the speeches and writings of Ho Chi Minh, Chairman of the Party, Truong Chinh and Le Duan, first secretaries of the party, the first from 1940 to 1956, and the second from 1960 (in fact from 1956) to the present day. These three men were the senior political strategists of the party.

How did they do it? Very simply: by applying the teachings of Lenin on the strategy and tactics of revolution. They usually added the word: creatively, that is, taking into consideration the local conditions of Vietnam and the nature of their enemies -- France, then the United States. Now, in my researches about the Vietnam war, I have found something rather astounding: few authors have taken the trouble of studying communism, especially the Russian brand of it, Leninism -- or bolshevism -- (the term bolshevism was used very frequently in the internal documents of the CPV). Of course, to study leninism -- or bolshevism -- is to study also the Communist International, or Third International, or Comintern. But I have found little emphasis on it in the many publications on Vietnam. That is why Ho Chi Minh and his comrades were considered "nationalists", "nationalist first and communist second", or "above communism", good Vietnamese patriots who simply wanted nothing more than independence for their country and a better life for their people.

I have found that these views did not correspond at all to those

of Ho Chi Minh and his comrades themselves. If we take the trouble of reading their internal writings, that is writings destined for the internal use of the party, we get a completely different picture. Down to 1985, and up to 1930 (year of the foundation of the party) and even up to 1927 (when Ho Chi Minh wrote a manual called The Road of Revolution for the training of his recruits), the leaders of the CPV affirmed, and reaffirmed ad nauseam, that they had always believed in communism, practised communism, and been good communists, that is, they had always observed the teachings of ~~the~~ Lenin and remained faithful to leninism in theory and practice, and to the aims and methods of the Communist International.

And what were the aims of the International Communist? Spread Communism -- i.e. dictatorship of the proletariat -- by violence and devious methods throughout the world. Some would protest by saying that the Comintern was dissolved by Stalin in May 1943. But it is a case of: "The King is dead, long live the King!" As far as the CPV was concerned, the dissolution of the Comintern was not even mentioned in party resolutions. It was just a leninist tactical move, like the dissolution of the Communist Party of Indochina (CPI) in November 1945, which was hailed by foreign observers as a gesture of sacrifice by the party, but which the CPV itself has explained in its internal documents as a tactical move. To borrow a term from a student of the Communist International, the CPV was a party which continued to practice "unconditional loyalty" to the Comintern after the dissolution of that organization. This is clear also from a reading of its resolutions after 1943.

Strategically, the CPV, right from 1930, viewed their revolution as a two-stage one: 1) first stage: getting national independence; 2) second stage: establish socialism -- i.e. dictatorship of

the proletariat -- in Vietnam and throughout the world. These are the two strategic tasks, the two flags, as the CPV has said repeatedly, under which the party had waged its struggle since its foundation.

Tactically, however, in the first stage, only the first flag -- national independence -- was raised, so as to avoid scaring potential allies -- national bourgeoisie, small bourgeoisie, landlords, intellectuals etc... -- and rally them around the party, through the device of United National Front. Only after independence has been won under Communist hegemony will the second flag be raised. This is what happened in 1951 (when the CPV was absolutely certain of victory because Communist China provided a safe rear and active support) in North Vietnam, and in 1975 in South Vietnam. For the non-Communists who had supported the United National Front, once victory had been won, it was too late to do anything about stopping or resisting communism.

This strategy and tactics allowed the CPV to present to the world, and particularly to French and then American opinion, the image of themselves as simply Vietnamese patriots fighting for the independence of their country, and to put the French and American governments in the awkward moral position of appearing to fight an unjust, "dirty" war, and made it impossible for these governments to secure political support to fight a long and costly war. In the long run, the French and American governments decided to give up, and give away Vietnam, first North Vietnam, then South Vietnam. This was officialized at Geneva in 1954, and Paris in 1973. All the communists had to do was to wait, take the blows, and pick up what the French, and then the Americans, abandoned.

I mentioned at the beginning the two prevalent answers to the questions of the fundamental ~~true~~ nature of the Vietnam war, and I considered both to be wrong. The true answer to the question about the

nature of the war is that, fundamentally, it was neither a war for an ideology or a piece of territory, but a test of wills between two adversaries. These adversaries were not Vietnam on one side, and France, or the United States, on the other side, or two groups of Vietnamese -- communist and nationalists -- but the communist camp and the anti-communist camp, the one headed by the Soviet Union and the other by the United States. The anti-communist camp has lost, not by lack of means, but of will, not by lack of material power, but of will power. Also, of course, by sheer ignorance of the real nature of communism. To believe that a communist can be nationalist first and communist second, that a communist is a patriot who fights just for the independence of his country and the welfare of his people, is simply to understand nothing about communism, and especially about Vietnamese communism, at all. A communist, especially a Vietnamese communist, is communist first, second, and last. Period. For France or the United States to have lost the war is then not very surprising. One cannot win a war if one does not know one's enemy. Sun Zi said that long ago.

I do not wish to give the impression that there is only one cause for the fall of Vietnam. There are of course others. To mention only two major ones: geography and political structure.

As everyone concerned with the history of Southeast Asia knows, after World War II there were two important communist meetings, one at Wilaya Gora, Poland, in September 1947, and one at Calcutta, <sup>India</sup> in February 1948. At the meeting in Poland, the new Soviet policy, known as the Jhdhanov line -- the world is divided into two camps -- was proclaimed; at the second, the communists of Southeast Asia were form-

ally informed about this new line. The result was an explosion of communist insurrections all over Southeast Asia. But in the next thirty years, of all the communist parties of Southeast Asia, only the CPV succeeded in capturing power and establishing a communist state, the first such state in Southeast Asia and among the colonial countries. It is natural to ask why.

The answer to the question why, of all Southeast Asian Communist parties, only the CPV succeeded so spectacularly, has to do partly with the character of the Vietnamese people, the quality of the CPV leadership, the pursuit of wrong policies by France, the United States and also of China (in 1945-1947). But, above all, the fundamental fact is geographical. Of all the communist insurrectional movements of Southeast Asia, only the Vietnamese Communists had a huge and safe rear base, which stretched all the way from the Sino-Vietnamese border to East Berlin. This immense rear base constituted a sanctuary -- for rest, recuperation, training -- and particularly, an inexhaustible source of supplies. It is no accident that only ~~after~~ after the Chinese Communist forces <sup>had</sup> reached the Sino-Vietnamese borders in late 1949, was the CPV able to inflict on the French the greatest military disaster of their colonial history: a force of 7000 men was annihilated in a single battle. That took place in the summer of 1950, along the Sino-Vietnamese border. We now know from Chinese Communist public disclosures in 1979 that the Chinese Communists not only supplied the training and the weapons, but also helped in planning the campaign and supplied military advisers to the high command of the Vietnamese People's Army (VPA). The 1950 campaign signaled the beginning of the third phase of the CPV military strategy: that of the general counter offensive.

With regard to help to North Vietnam and the Liberation Front of South Vietnam (LFSV) in the war against the United States, we know, also from public disclosures from Beijing, that communist China supplied several million rifles, several thousand artillery pieces, over one billion cartridges, about ten thousand millions artillery shells, and other materials, and about ten billion Renminbis' worth of military material, including several millions meters of cotton cloth, about 100 locomotives, several thousand wagons, more than 700 boats of all kinds and several tens of thousands of motor vehicles. (This was described by Renmin Ribao on November 21, 1979, and reproduced in Beijing Information, French edition, on December 3, 1979). According to Le Monde of August 1, 1979, Yang Gonsu, deputy chief of the Chinese Communist delegation in the Sino-Vietnamese negotiations, disclosed publicly in August 1979 that between 1950 and 1977, Communist China supplied the Communist forces in Vietnam with 2 million small weapons and machine guns, 270 million cartridges, 27,000 pieces of artillery, 18.8 million of artillery shells, 179 airplanes and 145 boats.

From Vietnamese Communist sources, Hoang van Hoan, a former ambassador to Beijing and a member of the Central Committee and Politburo of the CPV who defected to Communist China in 1978, disclosed that between 1950 and 1978, Communist China gave Communist Vietnam aid totalling 20 billion US dollars (714 million per year) and that aid was enough to arm 2 million men, and to do many other things. Furthermore, at the request of Ho Chi Minh, in 1965 300,000 troops, belonging to Chinese Communist anti-Aircraft, Engineering, Railway and Logistics units, came to work in North Vietnam (Renmin Ribao, November 29, 1979, reproduced in Beijing Information, in French, December 10, 1979). Hoan gave more details, but I will not bother you with them.



I have cited enough facts and figures to show that the stories describing the Vietnamese Communist forces as a rag-tag army of poorly armed guerillas defeating the giant forces of France, and particularly of the United States, so prevalent before 1975, were pure myths aimed at brain-washing public opinion, particularly in the West.

Unfortunately, they were very successful in winning sympathy for the communists.

To come back to Southeast Asia, none of the Southeast Asian communist insurrectional movements received such aid simply because they did not have a common border with a major communist power. Without this aid they could not have the slightest hope of winning. This fact should be kept constantly in mind when one seeks an answer to the question: why did Vietnam fall to communism? Incidentally, let me stray for a second from Vietnam and offer the reflection that if the Soviet Union had not been invited into Manchuria in the last days of 1945 the history of China, too, might have been different.

So far, I have not mentioned the bases available to the Vietnamese communist forces in Cambodia, as well as the infiltration route through Laos, popularly referred to as the "Hochiminh trail", but which, we now know from Vietnamese communist public disclosures, was in fact a double-tract motor highway running from North Vietnam, through Laos, to South Vietnam. This ~~is~~ so-called trail, appropriately, was called by the American officials in Saigon "the Harriman Highway". (because Harriman's concessions to the communist side at Geneva in 1961-62 made it possible for North Vietnam to use Laotian territory freely). Through this highway the Hanoi government could send large number of troops and huge quantities of war material to the South. On the other hand, the bases along the Vietnam-Cambodian border made it possible for the communist forces to have staging areas for attacking South Vietnam,

then withdraw back into Cambodia, in perfect security. The Harriman highway and the Cambodian sanctuaries, added to the limitless Chinese communist supplies to the Vietnamese communist forces, made an effective defence of South Vietnam practically impossible, and were thus an important contributing factor to the fall of Vietnam.

Another factor was the political structure of the democracies, in particular, of parliamentary democracies. It is a basic principle of such democracies that the government must have popular support for its actions. It is another basic principle that elections must take place at regular intervals, and the government may change as a result of these elections. It is yet another basic principle that there is complete freedom of expression and association. While it is undeniable that from the point of view of the protection of the individual's freedom such a form of government is the best, from other points of view there are great disadvantages: 1) there is no guarantee of continuity of policy, especially of external policy; in fact, rather discontinuity is more likely;

2) such democracies are wide open to enemy infiltration and subversion, covert and concealed, through the press, the universities and in other ways;

3) it is very difficult to fight against such infiltration and subversion, which generates confusion in the minds of the people and, as a result, causes division in the nation in certain cases, in particular in that of the pursuit of a long costly and limited war fought under conditions of great constraints, against an enemy who is not subject to any of the above disadvantages, who is a master of propaganda, agitation and deception techniques, and who deliberately and ruthlessly exploits these advantages.

I have mentioned earlier the strategy and tactics used by the CPV. Against these strategy and tactics, a parliamentary democracy in powerless unless public opinion is outraged by a blatant act of aggression to rise up in unison to demand retaliation -- as after the invasion of Poland in 1939 and Pearl Harbour in 1941 -- . But the communists, well taught by Lenin, are much more devious than the nazis and the fascists. The two-stage strategy of the CPV was much too subtle for any but the real expert to grasp its full implications, or for any information service of a parliamentary democracy, which operates on the rule of clear evidence, to be able to explain these implications to the public. I have also stressed earlier that the Vietnam war was basically a war between two camps, South Vietnam was an ally in one of the two camps, but only a junior one. When American public opinion, tired and confused, demanded and obtained the withdrawal of American forces, South Vietnam was left alone facing the whole communist world. It is not surprising that there should be a collapse of morale in the South Vietnamese forces which led to rapid disintegration. One could imagine what would have happened in 1940 if, on the eve of the battle of Britain, president Roosevelt had declared that Britain's war was of no concern to the United States!

There are other causes, of course: the weakness of South Vietnamese society, with its grave political, economic and social problems; the mistakes of the French and American governments; the decisions of the Free World, etc... There is not enough time for me to deal with them all. This will not affect in a significant degree the analysis presented above, and I do not feel guilty of leaving them out.

Now, with regard to the second part of this paper, I shall be more brief, because, as I have said earlier, it is subjective. What I have

to say may interest you as a view coming from a South Vietnamese, but I personally do not wish to indulge in personal reflections inside the walls of such an institute as yours, where methodological rigour is the rule. However, since director Shaw has, by implication, indicated in the formulation of the topic, that he was prepared to wave this rule for the occasion, I shall take advantage of it and offer a few reflexions, as a Vietnamese, and personally. In the process, I will venture also to draw some comparison between Vietnam and China.

As I have stressed earlier, as a historian, I view the Vietnam war basically as a contest of wills. This should not surprise those familiar with military history and with the ideas of von Clausewitz, of which Mao Zedong was an avid reader. (Many of Mao's ideas on war were adopted by the CPV). I also stressed that it was a contest of wills between two camps which, in effect, was a contest of wills between the Soviet Union and the United States. Vietnam itself was not a prize, ideological or territorial, simply the occasion for such a contest. Vietnam was therefore not the principal, but a secondary party to this contest. Its actions, its performance, could therefore not be decisive. To win, it would have to defeat not just North Vietnam, but the whole of the communist bloc. Suppose that South Vietnam had carried the war to the North, and defeated and occupied North Vietnam, the war would still continue because the Vietnamese communists would withdraw to China; from China, with Chinese communist and Soviet support, ~~they~~ would still be able to continue the War. The war could <sup>not</sup> be stopped. This could be done only as a result of action by the United States, in particular, if the United States made it clear that an attempt to overrun Vietnam would lead to Soviet and Chinese Communist direct confrontation with

the United States, as was done when Mr. Foster Dulles was at the helm of American foreign policy. While Mr. Dulles was in office South Vietnam was left alone. But after his death, things changed.

It follows from what I have just said that all the blames heaped upon South Vietnam -- dictatorial government, ineptitude, corruption, unwillingness to fight, and so on -- become really irrelevant. All these charges were made against Free China too. They served only as convenient pretexts to cover up a major fact: the United States, as a nation -- and not just the government -- did not have the will to prevent a communist victory which has very serious long term effects on the position of the United States, and of the non-communist world as a whole. You are familiar with the strategic, and other arguments, about the importance of Vietnam, as of many other places, to the United States, in the light of the development of new weaponry. After China, Vietnam. Now, even the Philippines are not absolutely necessary to the U.S. (there was talk of contingency plans <sup>using</sup> alternative bases some time ago when Mrs. Aquino was talking about revising the Philippine -- U.S. agreement on the bases).

I am not trying to exonerate Vietnam completely. If Vietnam is lost, the Vietnamese are to blame. That is natural 國難興亡匹夫有責. I, like all other Vietnamese, have a share of the blame. But, as a social scientist, I have also tried to understand why, apart from the reasons I have mentioned, Vietnam was lost. I have done this not theoretically, as a scholar sitting in some well cooled or heated library of Europe or America, but in the field, in my own country, looking at things and people around me. I did this since I was still at school. This was not 生而知之, but 學而知之 and, particularly, 困而知之.

What did I see, over a period of fifty years? A society whose natural development had been blocked and distorted by the failure of the Imperial Court to adapt the appropriate reforms in time, as was the case of the Ch'ing Court here. That was in the 1840s and early 1850s. By 1860 it was too late. France had already set foot on Vietnam, beginning with the South. Cochinchina, as the French called Southern Vietnam until 1950, was lost partially in 1860, and totally in 1865. The rest followed rather quickly, once French appetite had been wetted and once France had discovered that Vietnam was in no position to resist French encroachments. In 1874 all of Vietnam became a French protectorate, and in 1885 French control became total: it could even freely depose, install and exile the Vietnamese emperor. A period of French colonial rule then followed.

The effects of colonial rule on colonial societies are too well known for me to dwell on them here. Briefly put, Vietnamese society was totally distorted: intellectually, culturally, socially, politically. The French looked after their interests and paid only attention to what furthered those interests. The problems of Vietnam's society were left untouched and, in time, accumulated as well as deepened. When French rule was terminated abruptly by Japan on March 9, 1945, Vietnam had a pile-up of 60 years' problems of every kind, in a situation of chaos, lack of preparation, of resources, of cadres, of leadership. Only the communists had the leadership, the cadres, the organization, the preparation, thanks to their Moscow connection. Unfortunately for Vietnam, the communists were trained only in one thing: politics, in particular revolutionary politics -- subversion, and destruction, and partisan power --, and in addition, their aims, as I have stressed earlier, were not the welfare and freedom of the

Vietnamese people, but world revolution -- dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale -- The communist ends were not Vietnam's ends, and the means required for their realization were beyond Vietnam's means.

In any case, the communists had the nice and easy job of destroying. And they went about it with fury, passion, and unfortunately with great effectiveness, having been well trained in Moscow, or by leaders who had themselves received training in Moscow. The result was insecurity political instability, social strife, economic paralysis. In these conditions, no government could govern effectively and satisfy the people's demands for a better life. And any government, including a communist government -- as we, and the communists themselves, know since 1975 -- faced with such a situation, would find it impossible to please the people. Furthermore, when it was constantly denounced not only by the communists, but also by its allies, its position became untenable. Either it chose all out democracy, as was demanded by the intelligentsia and bourgeoisie, encouraged strongly in this by well meaning Western friends, and threw the country wide open to communist subversion; or it chose total control, and would face violent charges of dictatorship by its western friends and allies; or it chose a middle course, and would get the worst of both worlds. That was the situation faced by every Vietnamese government. And that is why every Vietnamese government was unpopular, at home and abroad. The communist faced the same problems, too. But with a difference: they were not responsible for the immediate solution of these problems; therefore they did not have to worry about popularity at home, or among their allies: aid, in particular logistic aid, would continue, no matter what. In these conditions, the odds were on the side of the communists.

Now, given time, understanding and continued support, and steady aid, the above problems could be solved. But no South Vietnamese got

these conditions from its allies. France did not have the necessary resources or political enlightenment. The United States, especially the American press and intelligentsia, did not have the patience and the perceptiveness of the problems of colonial countries or of the true nature of communism, to provide Vietnam with what it needed to cope with both underdevelopment and communist subversion. And the communist had an easy time stirring up discontent, especially among the peasants. Here, I touch upon a basic question which has been much misunderstood, and which needs some clarification. I had the opportunity of observing developments connected with the question of agrarian reform in South Vietnam, and I can speak with some intimacy about it.

If you read the literature about Vietnam prior to 1975, and especially to 1965, you will surely notice that President Ngo Dinh Diem had been blamed severely for failing to contain communism because he was unable to win over the peasantry, and this because his land reform was too timid (landowners were allowed to keep 100 hectares each, peasants were obliged to pay rent etc...). Now, in 1955-56, when Wolf Ladejinsky -- a name well known to you here -- came to Vietnam to help with land reform there, the problem was different from the problem here. In Vietnam, over the years, the communists had already confiscated the land and distributed it among the peasants. To implement a radical land reform president Ngo Dinh Diem would need large amounts of money to buy out the land owners; otherwise he would

have to expropriate them, purely and simply. If he did that, there was no point in having a non-communist government in Vietnam; it would make more sense to let Ho Chi Minh and the CPV govern.

President Diem did not have the money. I do not know how much exactly was needed, but I would guess 300-500 million dollars, and



probably not more than billion dollars, would do the job. He could not get that money from the Americans. In 1955-1956 nonmilitary aid was about 150 million per year. American officials told him that Congress would not appropriate money "for socialism". They consented some money to cover the administrative costs of the program. And that was all. When one thinks that the Americans will spend over 300 billion dollars, not to say anything about over 50,000 lives, in later years, and still lose the war, while 300 million, or even 1 billion dollars, could have won a victory in 1956-1960, one must really wonder whether there is such a thing as political sense -- understanding a problem, making the right decision, and having the courage and determination to carry it out. When the Americans decided to give money massively to the South Vietnamese government, under president Nguyen Van Thieu in 1970-1973, it was too late. The cancer that sapped Vietnam's strength was far too advanced. Yet, the land reform was successful, posthumously, so to speak, because the peasants got the land, and after 1975, vigorously resisted communist attempt to take it away from them. This is one the paradoxes of the Vietnam war. The communists now have an agrarian problem working against them, and a peasantry opposed to their rule.

There are many more things I would like to speak about, but time, and perhaps your patience too, is running short, and I must resist the temptation of trying to speak of everything. I would like to say something about China and Vietnam because since I arrived here, certain things have become focused more clearly in my mind.

The fact that strikes me most, in fact, it is a glaring one, is that free China has achieved a spectacular revolution, a sort of Meiji revolution, but better, because it was achieved in half the time that took Japan to do the same, and it has reached a higher level. Here average income has reached over 3100 US dollars per year, as against 200-250 for Mainland China. And here, people are now talking casually

about an average income of 12,000-13,000 US dollars per year in the year 2000 -- only 14 years away --, whereas the communist leaders on the mainland have hoped to bring average income there <sup>from 200 US dollars now</sup> to 800-1000 at the end of this century, a target which may not be reached because, according to recent information from Beijing, there is a great deal of resistance from the party cadres to the changes introduced by Deng Xiao-ping. A new power struggle may develop, engulf the mainland in another kind of cultural revolution that will set back the mainland's development for another 20 years. In any case, even if the mainland can progress quickly, under communism the people there cannot hope to enjoy the freedom, prosperity and sense of hope and relaxed atmosphere that are so visible here. I asked a young American the other day what he was doing here, he said he had come here to ~~studying~~ Chinese. I then asked him why he did not go to the mainland, since his country had diplomatic relations with Beijing, and he answered: "Here, it is cheaper, and it is like America". An astounding, but quite revealing, answer. And it speaks volumes.

If people, Chinese included, were asked in the 1950s or 1960s whether Free China should continue to exist, many people would probably said no, or would hesitate to give a clear answer. Today, the answer is surely yes. Even Deng Xiao ping and his comrades have expressed readiness to accept a Free China with loose links with the mainland (one country, two systems). That may be a political ruse. But it has a value of symbol: it is a supreme compliment paid to Free China. At least, that is how I personally see it. I view the various liberalization measures of Deng Xiaoping aimed at improving

quickly the conditions of the Chinese people on the mainland as the result of the pressure exercised by the success story of non-communist China. So, what has happened here, on this island, has benefited not only the people here, but also the people on the mainland, and has been a source of hope for them, as indeed also for all the underdeveloped countries who had been groping for a path of development which would yield both quick progress and a maximum of personal freedom. Since I came here, I have become more convinced than ever that Free China should continue to exist, for China's sake as well as the sake of many other countries, indeed for the whole world. But this would not have been possible if there was nothing left of non-Communist China at all in 1949 and since then. This brings me back to Vietnam, and to the question: should South Vietnam have been abandoned in 1973?

The answer to the above question is obviously: No. The reasons are the same as those applied to Free China. If a Free Vietnam continued to exist, it would have forced the communists from refraining to impose a regime of terror, brutality, and dire poverty on the whole of Vietnam, as it has been doing since 1975, and in time, it would have to liberalize its regime, if only for reasons of political ruse, as on mainland China. The continued existence of South Vietnam would have contributed to the maintenance of hope in the Vietnamese living under communist rule in North Vietnam. The continued existence of a free South Vietnam would have prevented a weakening of the position of the United States, that is of the whole non-communist world, because it would give moral encouragement to all the countries struggling against communist conquest.

Of course, there are important differences between Free China and South Vietnam. I have often wished that South Vietnam were an island, like Taiwan, or at least a near-island like South Korea. That would make communist infiltration on a large scale, and hence subversion and invasion, impossible. But even without being an island or a near island, South Vietnam could have been secure and free to develop if the United States had made it clear to the Soviet Union that it had to choose between global peace, or global war. <sup>As mentioned earlier,</sup> President Eisenhower's administration, with Mr. Dulles at the helm of American diplomacy, did that, and the communist camp left South Vietnam alone between 1954 and 1959, the best years for the country, with visible security, stability, and economic progress. After the disappearance of Mr. Dulles, things changed. In 1961, in Vienna, in his talks with Khrushchev, President Kennedy chose partial peace -- just peace between the United States and the Soviet Union --, and, as a consequence, communist - incited troubles have plagued the non-communist world, especially the third world countries, ever since, as the Soviet Union could expand its influence there without any risk to itself. South Vietnam was a victim of this situation. That is the tragedy of South Vietnam.

As a South Vietnamese, I deeply feel the tragedy that has befallen my country. But this is only a personal matter. As a historian, I have to keep personal considerations out of my studies. You are all familiar with Max Weber's two famous essays entitled "Politics as a vocation" and "Science as a vocation". We should not, and we cannot, pursue politics and science at the same time. As a historian, then, I shall only say that I see a lack of true statesmen -- that is political leaders possessing great wisdom -- in our epoch, in particular in the free world. This is the source of the great troubles besetting the world in the past thirty years. The loss of Vietnam is a clear demonstration of this fact. Thank you.