

- OWIOffice of War Information
- PAVNPeople's Army of Vietnam
- PGVProvisional Government of Vietnam (Ho Chi Minh's government in August 1945)
- PRKPeople's Republic of Kampuchea
- SEATOSoutheast Asia Treaty Organization
- SRVSocialist Republic of Vietnam
- Viet-MinhViet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh (National Independence League)
- VNQDDViet Nam Quoc Dan Dang (Vietnamese Kuomintang)
- VRYAVietnam Revolutionary Youth Association
- VWPVietnam Workers' party

Introduction

In deciding to undertake this study, two thoughts came to my mind, one from Pascal and one from Confucius. According to the well-known French thinker, everything has been said, and one always comes too late. The great Asian philosopher, for his part, has warned that we should beware of those after us.

Anyone seeking reading material on Vietnam soon learns that there is a vast literature on the subject, especially on the decades preceding 1975. However, most of the writings that cover Vietnam before the conquest of the southern part of the country by the Communists dealt essentially with the war, and more particularly, with the involvement by the United States in the war. Moreover, these works were largely emotional and polemical. It is only in recent years, especially since the Communist victory in April 1975, that a number of scholars, fascinated by the spectacular and apparently easy success of the Vietnamese Communists, have decided to look closely at the phenomenon of Vietnamese communism as such.

The result has been the appearance of a number of interesting studies on certain aspects of Vietnamese communism: its history, its organization, its rise to power, its place in the Vietnamese nationalist movement, and so on . . . These studies were methodical, searching, detailed, and clearly reflected the desire of their authors to avoid polemics, especially the antiwar and anti-American polemics that had marked earlier publications.

The studies concerned tended, however, to dwell too much on one aspect: the nationalism of the Vietnamese Communists. The Communist party of Vietnam (CPV) was depicted as a party of true nationalists who were able to seize power with relative ease, to hold on to it, and to extend it steadily, thanks to their superior organization and political skills, their dedication, integrity, and determination; in a word, to what the Communists themselves called "the subjective factor." By contrast, heavy stress

was laid on the fact that the other nationalist groups lost because they lacked dedication, were organizationally weak, divided, inept, corrupt, too dependent on foreign support, and so on . . .

The above bias had material as well as methodological origins. The "success" of the CPV cannot be fully understood in terms of the subjective factors alone. What the Communists called the objective factors, in particular the external factors, are at least as important as the subjective factors. To cover fully both the subjective and the objective aspects of the CPV's "success" would require a more extensive and much more careful study, and this is not always easy or possible.

The CPV has certainly achieved success, but only from the point of view of the interests of the party and of international communism, in particular those of the Soviet Union. From the point of view of the Vietnamese people, whose real aspirations were for a peaceful, freer, and better life, the success is not so obvious, especially in the light of what has become undisputable since 1975. In fact, since the CPV established its dominion over the whole of Vietnam, its record has appeared increasingly one of failure, currently as well as retrospectively.

Seen from the vantage point of 1985, the failure of the CPV has to do with the real aims it had pursued since its foundation. These aims, as appear clearly in this study, were global, set against the background of international communism and taking full account of this factor, which is an objective factor. The success of the CPV must therefore be viewed against the background of the influence of this objective factor.

A study of the CPV's foreign politics is necessary for a full understanding of Vietnamese communism, and of the Vietnam question generally. This aspect has not been dealt with extensively or adequately so far in writings on Vietnam. Pascal's statement, when applied to Vietnam, is therefore not correct. All has not been said about that land, and one does not come too late. There still is something to be said about Vietnam. A gap exists.

The gap concerns the foreign politics of the CPV, in particular, about how international developments were viewed by the CPV and how, at certain crucial moments, the CPV took advantage of the situation, and more particularly, manipulated certain people to achieve its true ends; specifically, to accelerate the coming of world revolution, i.e., the establishment of communism—the dictatorship of the proletariat—on a world scale; or how it was prevented from achieving its ends because of adverse international developments, or of its misreading of the international situation. Naturally, the way the CPV looked at international developments

and tried to exploit situations and manipulate people stemmed from the basic philosophical ideas of its leaders. An examination of these ideas and how they had been acquired—i.e., the training aspect—must therefore form an important part of a study of the CPV's foreign politics.

This study is an attempt to fill a certain gap on Vietnam by examining the above aspects of the politics of the CPV. My aims, however, are quite modest. I make no claim regarding comprehensiveness or exhaustiveness, originality, or finality. This study is essentially exploratory, an attempt to use an approach different from the one adopted generally so far, which consists of viewing the CPV as a fierce champion of Vietnamese national interests rather than as a zealous servant—wittingly or unwittingly—of international communism.

My study is restricted essentially to one particular aspect of Vietnamese history—Vietnamese communism—and within these narrow limits, it focuses on only one aspect—its foreign *politics*. It does not deal with the broad range of the CPV's foreign policy or foreign relations. For these broader aspects I rely on work already done by others. If there is originality in what I try to do, this would lie rather in the special and close attention given to the doctrinal consideration and to the strategy and tactics applied by the CPV to particular situations, especially to crucial people at crucial moments, and viewed in the light of what the CPV leaders themselves have said about their past actions, and of the stream of Vietnamese publications available since 1975.

This last point deserves stressing. It relates to Confucius' warning. The student of Vietnamese communism, and of Vietnamese affairs in general, enjoys as of 1985 a great advantage over those working in these fields before 1975. He or she has available more illuminating facts. Indeed, since 1975 the Communist government of Vietnam has displayed a behavior, pursued policies, and made statements that throw much, and new, light on what it had really sought to achieve, how, and why, since the early days of the CPV in Canton in 1925.

The student of Vietnamese communism and of Vietnamese affairs in general also has available a mass of documentation put out by Hanoi, especially since 1975. Having won total victory, and not being subject any longer to tactical propaganda constraints, the leaders of the CPV now feel not only quite free, but also happy and proud, to reveal their true intents and objectives, the true motivations and methods of their past actions, partly in self-praise (for their intelligence, farsightedness, and cleverness), partly as lessons for the countries of the Third World (as recipes for defeating Yankee imperialism).

Whatever the reasons for those revelations, they help students of Vietnamese affairs to gain a better insight into the behavior of the CPV leaders. At the same time, they should incite those trying seriously to understand and to interpret Vietnamese communism and Vietnam in its various aspects, including the nature of the Vietnam wars and the respective roles of the CPV, France, and the United States in those conflicts, to engage in an extensive and thorough revision. From this revision one is likely to obtain a more balanced and more accurate picture of what really happened in Vietnam before 1975, as well as a clearer understanding of what has been happening since then, not only in Vietnam, but also in Indochina and Southeast Asia. Thus Confucius was right: those who come later can know better.

This study is not a history of contemporary Vietnam, or of the Vietnam wars, or of Vietnamese nationalism, although, inevitably, it touches upon these aspects and on many others of the Vietnam question. In particular, I am not concerned with the domestic politics of the CPV—its exploitation of the internal situation of Vietnam and its manipulation of the Vietnamese people—or with its internal politics—the struggle between tendencies, factions, individuals, however interesting or fascinating these aspects may be. I am quite happy to leave them to the “Hanoiologists” and Vietnam watchers. I shall hold the basic view that since the CPV, as a good Communist party by Third International standards, operated fully on the basis of democratic centralism, any decision of the central committee, politburo, first secretary, or chairman of the party represented a decision of the party and expressed its collective will.

A knowledge of the day-to-day occurrences in the CPV, in particular, of the power struggle going on inside the party, is necessary, but much more so to the policymakers and political forecasters concerned with Communist Vietnam than to the historian, who is mainly interested in basic trends and whose views are essentially retrospective. I believe that unless one has a good knowledge of those trends—the basic thinking, beliefs, *modus operandi*, strategy, and tactics—of the CPV, one would not be able to understand clearly its behavior and decisions at particular moments, and still less make accurate predictions about its courses of action over the long haul, which is what really matters.

It is the ignorance, or neglect, of the basic trends that has led, for example, to the widespread views, or rather myths, that the Vietnamese Communists were “nationalist first and Communist second,” that Ho Chi Minh was “above communism,” that the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam was not a creation of Hanoi, or that “the ultimate aim”

of the Vietnamese Communists is the establishment of the Federation of Indochina, and so on . . . whereas, as we see later, a careful examination of the pronouncements of the leaders of the CPV clearly reveal that none of the above views corresponded to reality, and that, in contrast, the Vietnamese Communists avoided calling themselves nationalists, making it perfectly clear that they were patriots totally committed to proletarian internationalism and to the overthrow of imperialism led by the United States, to world revolution, to the establishment of communism—the dictatorship of the proletariat—on a world scale.

The propagation, deliberate or involuntary, and especially the belief in such myths, had very important moral, and hence political, consequences: they put the Communists in the right, and those who oppose them in the wrong. The Vietnam war was therefore “dirty”; to wage war against the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam and against North Vietnam was “immoral,” and to oppose the Vietnamese Communists was “reactionary.” For the United States, a big and powerful nation, to wage war against North Vietnam was “cowardly.”¹ My primary purpose, however, is not to discuss this question, although I have something to say about it in my conclusion.

One more thing should be said about the subject matter of this study. Since the CPV’s foreign politics should be viewed against the setting of international politics, in particular, of the CPV’s connection with the Third International, the latter is an integral part of this book. Indeed, the CPV’s foreign politics could not be fully understood if one does not constantly keep in mind the fact that the CPV was a party that adopted without reservation the brand of theory and practice of politics—bolshevism—that Lenin tried hard to spread throughout the world, through the Communist International (Comintern), which he deliberately created for that specific purpose.

Concerning the sources, since this study is not a history of Vietnam or of the Vietnam wars in both their domestic and international aspects, or of Vietnamese communism per se, I draw freely from the works already done, of which there are many, a great many indeed. It would be tedious to list them here, even selectively. My great debt to their authors is acknowledged in the appropriate places.

With regard to the specific subject of my study, the collected speeches and writings of the leaders of the CPV, in particular, of the key political strategies (Ho Chi Minh, Truong Chinh, Le Duan, Vo Nguyen Giap, Pham Van Dong, and others), the History of the Communist Party of Vietnam, the account of Fifty Years’ Activities of the Party, the white

paper on Sino-Vietnamese relations, are extensively used, as they are of prime importance in providing insight into the thoughts and deeds of the leaders of the CPV. Some of these publications were available to me in Vietnamese, some in French, some in English. Preference was naturally given to the Vietnamese texts. If a publication was available to me only in French, I translated into English the parts quoted. The French title given in the reference shows that the publication used was in French.

The memoirs of certain foreign officials involved intimately in dealing with the CPV leaders at certain crucial moments, in particular those of Jean Sainteny and Archimedes L. Patti, respectively, heads of the French and American missions in Hanoi in August 1945, are of very great importance, and are used extensively. These two men were the first Allied officials to arrive in Hanoi that August. They had very close personal relations with Ho Chi Minh and played a key role in helping the CPV seize and consolidate power in a crucial period, and their memoirs provide extremely valuable insight into the foreign politics of the CPV, in particular into Ho Chi Minh's manipulation of key people at crucial moments to achieve his ends.

With regard to China, the testimonies of the Chinese officials who played a key role in North Vietnam during the crucial period 1945–1946, in particular Chang Fa-kwei and Hsiao Wen, I rely largely on the excellent book by K. C. Chen, who has interviewed them and made a searching study of Chinese official records.

With regard to Laos and Cambodia, certain Laotians and Cambodians who had closely witnessed developments in their countries, such as Sisouk Na Champassak, Prince Mangkra Phouma, Amphay Doré for Laos, Norodom Sihanouk for Cambodia, provide very valuable testimonies on the politics of the CPV leaders concerning those countries. The white, or black papers, published by the various governments involved in those countries also provide very important material.

With regard to the ASEAN countries, which really became involved with Vietnam only after 1975, the radio broadcasts from those countries and from the Indochinese nations, as monitored by FBIS,² are major sources, in addition to the official publications of the governments of those countries.

Concerning the divisions of this study, there are ten chapters. Chapter one describes the setting against which the foreign politics of the CPV are to be examined. This chapter is intended for those who approach Vietnamese studies for the first time and need an overview of the coun-

try's history from 1885 to 1985. Those who have already acquired a fair background on Vietnam should simply start reading from chapter two, which concerns Ho Chi Minh as master and leader of the party. Chapter three covers the party itself, describing its basic views and ideas concerning history, the world, politics, party aims, and the ways and means it planned to use to achieve them. These first three chapters form a whole and constitute part I of this study.

Next are five chapters on the United States, France, China, Laos and Cambodia, and ASEAN, respectively, showing how, concretely, the CPV manipulated particular situations, and especially particular people, to achieve its ends, and how successful or unsuccessful these manipulations have been. These chapters constitute part II of this study.

Chapter nine concerns the Soviet Union, showing how the CPV's connection with it, in particular with the Comintern, has affected its politics, the fate of Vietnam, and the Vietnamese people. In a final chapter, I offer a few personal reflections on the CPV and Vietnamese history. Chapters nine and ten form part III of this study.

In this book, I have chosen a topical rather than a chronological approach, and my cut-off point is 1985.

This study would not have been undertaken had it not been for two persons in particular: Professor Jacques Freymond and Professor Harish Kapur. Jacques Freymond, now retired director of the Graduate Institute of International Studies at Geneva, had, over a period of more than thirty years, encouraged me to keep up my interest in international studies, even when pressing patriotic obligations or practical considerations had kept me off the active pursuit of such studies.

Harish Kapur, currently a professor at the same institute, has been a friend and intellectual companion since our student days in 1954. We have had many lively and stimulating discussions over the years about many things, in particular about the writing of this book. In 1983 he finally succeeded in persuading me to undertake this study in spite of my great reluctance to embark on such a venture, as I knew that I would have to work under extremely heavy constraints: I would be very isolated geographically and would receive no material aid from any source. These constraints, I feared—and rightly—were bound to cause interruptions, delays, and naturally great frustrations. Without the persistent prodding and encouragement of Harish Kapur, I would probably not have completed the present work.

I also thank Mr. Nguyen Khac Ngu for helping with the maps.

Finally, I wish to record my very sincere thanks to the Information and Research Center, Singapore, for its encouragement, and for its help in the publication of this book.

I fully realize that this study is very imperfect. But, on the other hand, I am convinced that it will help clarify certain aspects of the Vietnamese question, including the Vietnam wars, and the frightful state of poverty, misery, and continued warfare in which the Vietnamese people have found themselves mired since 1975. This is an attempt at getting at the truth about Vietnam. Of course, the truth, the real truth, all of the truth, about Vietnam will not be known for a long time, if it will ever be known. But we must search for it, as objectively and, especially, as honestly as possible, if we want to really know Vietnamese communism, in the Confucian sense of really knowing:

To know that one know what one knows.

To know that one does not know what one does not know.

That is really knowing.

Trois Rivières, Québec, Canada
Summer 1987

Postscript: This book was completed in the summer of 1987. Since then, a number of events have occurred in Southeast Asia, especially in relation to Cambodia. However, these events have not invalidated my interpretations. I have therefore found that modifications to the book are unnecessary.

Trois Rivières
Autumn 1988.

1

The Setting

In the second half of the nineteenth century, taking advantage of Vietnam's weakness, France annexed the southern part of the country (Cochinchina; see map 1) and imposed a French protectorate on the rest. By the treaty of June 6, 1884, France took away defense and foreign affairs from the Vietnamese emperor, but left him in control of the country's internal affairs.¹ However, in 1885 the French authorities blatantly deposed the Vietnamese emperor and replaced him with a man of their choice, thus extending French direct rule over the whole of Vietnam. (The deposed emperor, Ham Nghi, was exiled to Algeria where he died during World War II. He was replaced by Emperor Dong Khanh, grandfather of Emperor Bao Dai.) These actions caused the outraged Vietnamese intelligentsia to start a series of rebellion movements, which had their ups and downs but which never completely ceased until French rule was fully terminated in 1954.

NATIONALIST MOVEMENTS

The first movement, named *Can Vương* (Support the King) and led by the Vietnamese Confucian scholars-mandarins, was monarchist in character. The most prominent of these scholars-mandarins was Phan Dinh Phung. For all the heroism and exertions of its members, the movement failed to shake French rule, and it lost much of its strength when Phan Dinh Phung died in 1895.

The nationalist torch was picked up a few years later by another Confucian scholar, Phan Boi Chau, who wanted to regain independence for a Vietnam under a monarch. But at the same time, he advocated modernization and seeking external aid. He thus launched the *Duy Tân* (Mod-