

The Myth of the Bloodbath: North Vietnam's Land Reform Reconsidered

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INTRODUCTION

American intervention in Vietnam has been justified increasingly in recent years by portraying the North Vietnamese leaders as ideological fanatics who would carry out a massive "bloodbath" against former foes if they were to gain power in South Vietnam. In particular, this argument, which has been promoted in a series of Presidential speeches, draws on allegations concerning the North Vietnamese land reform program which was carried out from 1953 to 1956. The essence of these allegations is that the land reform was a deliberate reign of terror aimed at eliminating whole economic classes and that tens or even hundreds of thousands of innocent people were killed.

This view of land reform has been broadly accepted by both American scholars and the public as an established fact. Yet there has never been a careful study of the land reform which makes use of all the available documentation. It is hoped that this essay may serve not only to unravel a central myth about the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, but also to reveal some of the "scratches on our minds" which underlie American policy in Vietnam.

I. THE LITERATURE OF THE LAND REFORM

The literature on North Vietnam's land reform is, first of all, a reflection of the low level of American scholarship on Vietnam in general and North Vietnam in particular.¹ For many years, the late Bernard Fall was virtually the only academic specialist on Vietnam who was independent of the U.S. government, and he commanded correspondingly great attention and respect for his views. But Fall's analysis of the DRV's land reform was limited severely by his failure to consult authoritative French sources on landholding in Tonkin. And like other authors who wrote about North Vietnam's land reform, Fall was unable to do research in the

original Vietnamese sources, particularly the Lao Dong Party's official organ *Nhan Dan* (*The People*). In trying to analyze a government and society on which virtually no journalistic or other non-official sources of information were available, this handicap was critical. For it meant that important documents were either not read at all or were obtained in summary translation from the U.S. or South Vietnamese governments. And those documents could have been distorted in the process of selection, translation and summarization so as to influence substantially the interpretation of developments in the North. This is precisely what happened in the case of certain documents used by American authors to characterize the land reform as an ideologically-motivated "bloodbath."

An even more significant consequence of the generally low level of knowledge of the DRV even among those considered specialists was that it was possible for a native of North Vietnam, Hoang Van Chi, to have an overwhelming influence. His book, *From Colonialism to Communism*, was relied on heavily as a primary source.² Its influence derives from his claim to first-hand knowledge of the land reform campaign up until April 1955, and his frequent assertions implying detailed and intimate knowledge of Lao Dong party policy. Indeed, a CIA official, George Carver, in recommending the book to the public, refers to Hoang Van Chi as a "former Viet Minh cadre."³ But in fact he was never a party member and, by his own account, he was only a teacher in a pre-college school in Thanh Hoa province from 1950 to 1955.⁴ Thus he was not connected either with the Viet Minh government or the Lao Dong party during the entire period of the land reform—a fact which appears nowhere in the book. Moreover, Chi was himself a relatively wealthy landowner, having inherited 20 acres from his parents.⁵ His antagonism to the DRV and to agrarian revolution led him, as we shall see, to make a number of assertions of fact where he actually lacked first-hand information.

Equally important in assessing his credentials is the fact of his direct involvement with Vietnamese and American propaganda organs after his arrival in South Vietnam in 1955. Chi worked for the Saigon government's Ministry of Information for some eight months in 1955 and 1956 and as a translator for the U.S. Information Agency.⁶ In 1958, Diem's Ministry of Information partially subsidized the publication of

his book, *The New Class in North Vietnam*,⁷ in which he first presented his account of the North Vietnamese land reform.⁸

In 1960, Hoang Van Chi received a grant from the Congress for Cultural Freedom to spend a year in Paris writing a book which would reach American and European audiences with his attack on the DRV land reform. For many years, the Central Intelligence Agency channeled funds to the Congress for Cultural Freedom as part of its global program of supporting anti-communist intellectual groups.⁹ USIA subsidized the publication in 1964 of *From Colonialism to Communism*, a fact admitted by the USIA Director Leonard Marks in September 1966.¹⁰ Hoang Van Chi then came to the US to work for the USIA, and he now lectures at AID's Washington Training Center.¹¹ As a participant in the training program for US personnel going to Vietnam, he boasted of having "served the government of President Diem with special attention to the psychological vulnerabilities of the Communist forces." Moreover, Chi claimed credit for one of the Diem government's major political warfare moves: the invention of the term *Viet Cong* to refer to anyone who supported the communist movement in Vietnam.¹²

Although other authors have contributed to the making of the "bloodbath" myth by abusing important documentary evidence, it is Hoang Van Chi who has committed the most serious and most numerous offenses in this regard. His account is based on a series of falsehoods, non-existent documents and slanted translations which leave no doubt that his purpose was propaganda rather than accurate history. Much of the analysis which follows will therefore deal with Chi's assertions and the documentation used to support them.

II. WHY LAND REFORM?

The land reform in North Vietnam is commonly portrayed as an essentially political campaign carried out to fulfill abstract ideological requirements which conflicted with the real needs of Vietnamese society.¹ Colonial Tonkin and Northern Annam, which together constitute the present territory of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, have been treated by the literature on the land reform as regions of small farmers owning the land they tilled, with little tenancy or inequality of landownership. This view seriously misrepresents the well-documented realities of the land tenure system in the North during the colonial period. The Red River area had an extraordinarily high ratio of population to land, and while most peasants did own some land, they owned so little that they were forced to work on additional land belonging to someone else.

According to French geographer Pierre Gourou, about 62% of the farming families owned less than one acre, while 20% owned less than one-half acre.² As Gourou pointed out in 1936, the owners of such minute plots "cannot live on their property and must hire themselves out, or else rent farms."³ And by the same token the farmer with even a few hectares of land inevitably became a landlord, renting it out to a number of small tenants. "In Tonking," Gourou said, "the description 'large property' must be given to farmlands of truly unimpressive size (from 3.6 hectares!)." ⁴ According to Yves Henry, there were some 21,000 landowners with between 3.6 and 18 hectares, while 1,000 more owned more than 18 hectares.⁵ But these figures certainly underestimated the number of large and middle landowners. Many of them, especially government officials, successfully hid their wealth

by various devices, including the dispersal of plots among several villages and false land title registration under the names of their tenants.⁶

Gourou estimated that 90% of the landowners (not taking into account the families without any land at all) owned only 36.6% of the total cultivated land area in Tonkin, while 10% of the landowners controlled 43.2% of it.⁷ And data collected by the DRV on all of the 3653 villages which went through land reform confirm Gourou's estimates.⁸ As of 1945, according to these figures, 89% of the rural population, comprising landless laborers, poor peasants and middle peasants, owned only 40% of the cultivated land. The poor peasants and landless laborers, who represented 60% of the population, owned only 10% of the land. At the same time, the 2.5% of the rural families who lived by renting out land, owned 24.5% of the land outright and controlled much more indirectly. Although in theory the needs of the landless and landpoor were supposed to be assuaged by a share of communal lands, which constituted an estimated 20 to 25% of the total cultivated farm land in the North, the reality was that these lands were usually monopolized by local notables, who exploited them for their own profit.⁹

The revolution of August 1945 and the war of resistance against the French which followed did not fundamentally alter the land tenure system of North Vietnam, despite the fact that many large landowners who worked for the French had their land confiscated and redistributed. By 1953, according to a DRV survey of 93 villages and 31 hamlets in 16 provinces, landlords still controlled 17% of the cultivated land while the poor peasants controlled only 18% of the land.¹⁰ Although the DRV introduced limited reforms aimed at reducing rents by 25% from the former 50 to 70% of the crop and reducing the interest on loans to poor peasants, compliance by the landlords was limited, even in areas which had long been liberated.

The reasons for the failure of these partial reforms were both political and economic. With the emphasis during the



Fig. 27. — (D.) Semeuses. *Đàn bà đang gieo mạ.*

resistance on the need to maintain tight unity of all social strata to oppose the French, peasants frequently were not informed by local cadres of their new rights or of the necessity to struggle for them.¹¹ In fact, the official Lao Dong Party organ made it clear that, although peasants should demand their rights, the method to be used was negotiation with the landlord, not coercion.¹² As one article in a party organ put it, "If the peasants are not tactful, it will harm the spirit of unity of the resistance."¹³ With the peasants thus discouraged from taking direct action against them, many landowners simply used their much greater economic power to intimidate tenants who might hesitate to pay the rent demanded of them. The realization by the party leadership that little progress had been made in rent reduction is indicated by a 1950 article in a party organ which asked, "What has the August Revolution brought for the peasants?" and answered, "Very little."¹⁴

But those writers who have portrayed the land reform as economically and socially unnecessary and as the product of the ideological fanaticism of the Vietnamese leaders have brushed aside the social and economic conditions which made it imperative.¹⁵ Bernard Fall's unwavering disapproval of the land reform was based on the erroneous assumption that the problem of inequality of land ownership was "acute" in South Vietnam but not in the North.¹⁶ In his first analysis of the land reform, Fall asserted that 98.7% of the "total farm land area" in Tonkin was "tilled by owners"—a statement which would lead one to believe that only 1.3% of the farm land was worked by tenant farmers.¹⁷ If true, it would indeed have made Tonkin's landholding system almost ideal. But the source from which he took the figure warned that 98.7% referred not to the percentage of farming units tilled by the owner (much less the "total farm area" tilled by their owners) but to the percentage of landowners who did not rent out all their land.¹⁸ In other words 1.3% of all those who owned land were landlords whose only income was from renting it to others. Fall's statement completely misrepresented the real situation, which was that the majority of the peasants either owned no land or so little that they had to rent *additional* land from a landlord to survive.

Fall should have been aware of the very high proportion of the landowners who did not own enough land to support their families, for he mentioned in the same study the

fact that 61% of the landowners held less than one acre—an amount which his own calculations showed to be too small to support an average-sized peasant family of five.¹⁹ Yet, as late as 1963, he was still asserting that in Tonkin, more than 98% of the tilled land was owned by small-holders and concluding that, "To speak of 'land reform' is farcical."²⁰ Similarly, in dismissing the need for radical land redistribution, Hoang Van Chi cites figures from Henry showing that 91% of the landowners held less than 5 hectares in pre-revolutionary Tonkin.²¹ His purpose is obviously to portray North Vietnam as a region of small-landowners. But this figure also misleads the reader, since it does not say anything about the landless and landpoor peasants who made up the majority of the population. In this manner, statistical data has been misused to make the distribution of land in the North appear more equitable.

The CIA's George Carver in a 1966 essay in *Foreign Affairs* wrote: "Though there were inequities in land ownership in North Vietnam, the Red River delta had the most extensive pattern of private ownership to be found anywhere in Asia."²² This misleading statement was only the prelude to his conclusion that the rationale for the land reform was "rooted in the dogmatic fanaticism of the Vietnamese Communist leadership."

The same authors who have attempted to portray the land tenure system in North Vietnam in such a way as to deny the need for land reform have also attempted to minimize the actual economic benefits which the poor peasants derived from the reform. Here again, it was Fall who took the greatest pains to prove the point with statistical evidence, and again that evidence was seriously abused.

Scorning the results of the land reform as "economically absurd," Fall argued that the resulting parcels of land were hopelessly inadequate. According to official DRV statistics which he used in *The Two Viet-Nams*, the average share of land distributed to agricultural workers, poor peasants and some middle peasants was about one acre, which increased the total holding of the average poor peasant family of five to 1.75 acres and that of the average agricultural laborer's family to 1.80 acres.²³ Fall asserts that at least one hectare (2.47 acres) was required by an average family for subsistence farming, without explaining how he reached this conclusion.²⁴ It appears that his 2.47-acre minimum derives from the figure of 800 grams of rice per day per person, which he had cited elsewhere as the minimum necessary for adequate nutrition.²⁵

But an investigation of the data on rice consumption in Vietnam reveals that this standard was quite extravagant: the average rice consumption per person per day in the much wealthier Mekong Delta region of South Vietnam, according to an official survey in 1959, was only about 470 grams per day.²⁶ Another survey of six different South Vietnamese provinces and Saigon carried out at about the same time discovered that the province with the highest average daily consumption of rice per person was Phong Dinh, with 472 grams, while the poorest provinces had an average of less than 400 grams.²⁷ These figures compel us to look more closely at the alleged inadequacy of the plots distributed under the land reform program in the North.

As of 1960, just over half of the cultivated rice land in North Vietnam produced two crops annually. However, even those parcels which grew only one crop per year appear to have been capable of producing enough rice to feed each



FIG. 28. — (D.) *Labourer. Người đang cày ruộng.*

family member as well as the average Mekong Delta peasant—even using an extremely conservative estimate of paddy production per acre.

The average per-acre rice production in 1956, 1957 and 1958, according to official DRV statistics, was 752, 729, and 828 kilos respectively.²⁸ But even if we take a figure as low as 600 kilos of paddy as the annual production of one acre, we find that 1.75 acres would produce 1050 kilos of paddy per year, or 2875 grams per day. If we assume that one kilo of paddy provides 650 kilograms of rice for consumption, the 1.75 acres would provide roughly 2000 grams per day, or 400 grams for each member of an average peasant family of five.

The real meaning of this statistic can best be understood by comparing it not with Fall's arbitrary requirement of 800 grams of rice per day but with the 264 grams which Yves Henry's more detailed study reported as the average daily consumption of rice per person in Tonkin in 1932.²⁹ Since there had been no increase in the productivity of riceland in the two decades which preceded land reform, it is likely that this figure represented the approximate level of consumption for the majority of peasants when the land reform program began. In dismissing the land reform program as "economically absurd," Fall simply ignored the evidence of a fundamental improvement in the nutrition of the average poor peasant family.

III. LAND REFORM POLICIES: MYTHICAL AND REAL

Secondary sources which have portrayed the North Vietnamese land reform as an ideologically-inspired campaign of mass murder have based their case almost entirely on Hoang Van Chi's supposedly authoritative account, which can be briefly summarized in three basic assertions: 1) the Vietnamese Communist leaders, following the lead of their Communist Chinese mentors, used land reform as a means for physical "liquidation of the defenseless landowning class."¹ 2) in order to insure the completeness of the liquidation, they established arbitrary quotas of landlords to be discovered and executed in each village; 3) the murder and terror required to accomplish the task went so far as to engulf party members, resistance veterans and innocent people, with the result that tens or even hundreds of thousands of people were killed in a massive "bloodbath."

In support of the first charge, Chi quotes what he calls the "famous slogan" of the Lao Dong Party regarding rural classes: "Depend completely on the poor and landless peasants, unite with the middle level peasants, seek an understanding with the rich peasants, and liquidate the landlords."² The slogan in question was indeed "famous" (since it represented the general policy of the party which every cadre was expected to understand thoroughly). But it was actually said, "abolish the feudal regime of land ownership in a manner that is discriminating, methodical and under sound leadership."³ There was, in fact, no slogan calling on the people to liquidate landlords.

Although Hoang Van Chi's account puts great emphasis on the public denunciation and trial of landlords, it falsely portrays their actual function in the context of the DRV's basic policy toward the landlords. Contrary to his allegations, only those landlords who had committed serious crimes were to be publicly denounced by local peasants and put on trial.

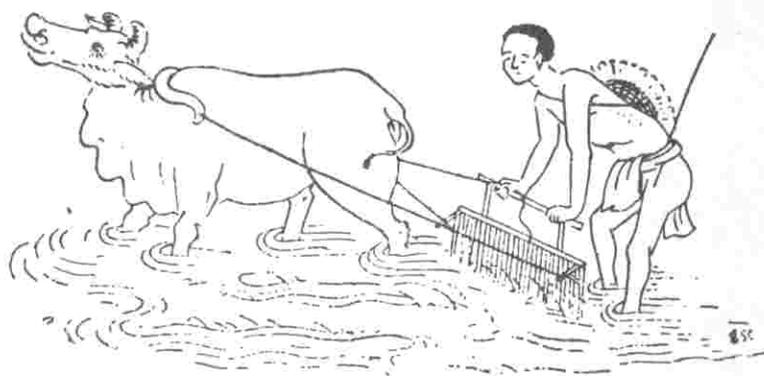


FIG. 29. — (D.) Herseur. *Người đang bừa ruộng.*

At the very beginning of the land reform process, in 1953, *Nhan Dan* emphasized the need to avoid any indiscriminate attack on landowners. "The object of the struggle is not all the landowners but only those who refuse to abide by the policy, who refuse to reduce rents and debts," it stated. Those who essentially abided by the law, it added, "even though they have a few shortcomings," would be "pardoned."⁴

The August 1953 resolution of the Lao Dong Party Political Bureau, which set forth the political line to be followed during the land reform program, also stated: "We must pay attention to distinctions in our actions regarding landowners, fundamentally dividing the landowning class and patronizing in the correct manner those who have participated in the resistance, because the fewer enemies we have, the better."⁵ The leading spokesman on the land reform declared in April 1955, "The government has a policy to lead the peasants to distinguish different kinds of landowners."⁶

The treatment of landlords was to be based on a three-fold distinction, depending on both the past political attitudes and behavior of the landlord and whether or not he resisted the land reform program. Those who had actively participated in the struggle against the French were to be considered "resistance landowners" and were to receive special consideration and compensation in the redistribution of their excess land. Those who were not active in the Viet Minh but who did not resist the DRV's laws and had committed no serious offenses against peasants were to be classified as "ordinary landowners." They were to retain a piece of land to till themselves and could change their class status after three to five years of honest labor.^{6a}

A final category was to include those who had committed more serious crimes. As a pamphlet issued in 1954 by the National Peasants' Association explained: "A severe punishment is reserved for traitors, criminals, notorious citizens hated by local people, and reactionary elements who try to destroy our resistance and land reform movements." Those who received hard labor sentences of more than five years, it said, would not receive any land, but their families were entitled to enough land for subsistence provided they were not accomplices in the landowner's crimes.

The sentences which could be meted out to landowners who violated various laws in connection with the rent reduction and land reform campaigns were fixed by Decree 151 of April 12, 1953. Lesser offenses, such as demanding illegal rent or attempting to disperse land to evade the new law, were liable to punishments ranging from a warning to

imprisonment up to one year. The destruction by a landowner of his own property "for the purpose of injuring the peasants or sabotaging production" was considered more serious and was punishable by imprisonment for a term from one to five years. Those actions aiming at disrupting the land reform through bribery, threats, rumors or other means were punishable by prison terms of three to ten years. And the most serious crimes, punishable by prison terms ranging from ten years to life or by death sentence, included "organizing armed bands and directing them in agreement with the imperialists and puppet administration in order to commit acts of violence; attempts upon the lives of peasants and experienced workers; arson and destruction of dwellings, warehouses, foodstuffs, crops, or irrigation works; instigation or direction of disorders."⁸

After the restoration of peace in 1954, in conformity with the Geneva Agreement's provision forbidding reprisals, the slogan "Overthrow traitors, reactionaries, and dishonest and wicked notables" was replaced by the slogan "Overthrow dishonest and wicked notables." The procedures in the mass mobilization campaign were also changed to forbid any general accusations of political crimes and to allow only civil and criminal charges to be brought against landlords.⁹

Far from assuming all landlords to be guilty of some crime, the party's expectation clearly was that the vast majority of them would be classified as "ordinary" landowners and would therefore be able to redeem themselves through labor on their own land. As the same government pamphlet explained, "The reason we give land to landlords is to open the way for them to work for a living and to reform. This is the humane policy of our government."¹⁰

One of the standard allegations about the land reform, found in a number of sources, is that the DRV's leaders established in advance a "quota" of landlords to be denounced and executed in each village, which put pressure on cadres to "discover" landlords to be punished even where none in fact existed. The story first appeared in a July 1957 *Time* magazine article which clearly reflected the work of official propagandists in Saigon. Dramatically entitled, "Land of the Mourning Widows," it described how the land reform had turned into a "bloodbath" because the "prestige of each Communist cadre was made dependent on the number of landlords sent to the gallows."¹¹

It seems to be more than coincidence that at about the same time as the *Time* article appeared, Hoang Van Chi was working on a book, published in January 1958, in which he claimed that the Lao Dong Party Central Committee had established a quota of five death sentences in every hamlet in North Vietnam. He further asserted that Chinese advisers not only had "taught the peasants how to classify the population" but also had controlled the whole land reform "point by point."¹²

Even before Chi's book was published in the US, a certain William Kaye, identified only as a "specialist in Asian and Communist agrarian problems"—the usual words used to conceal the identity of US intelligence analysts—wrote: "A predetermined number of landlords had to be found in each village, even if they did not, in fact, exist."¹³ The CIA's George Carver similarly charged that "each land reform team had a pre-assigned quota of death sentences and hard labor imprisonments to mete out and these quotas were seldom underfulfilled."¹⁴



FIG. 30. — (D.) Déplantation et repiquage du riz.
Người gánh mạ và người cấy.

A more important voice in swaying American public opinion was that of Bernard Fall. Apparently drawing upon Hoang Van Chi's account, he wrote, in *The Two Viet-Nams*, "Local party officials began to deliver veritable quotas of landlords and rich peasants, even in areas where the difference between the largest and smallest village plots was a quarter of an acre."¹⁵ Far from having demanded a "quota" of "dishonest and wicked notables" to be executed in each village, the party leadership acted at the beginning of the campaign to *limit* the number of landlords which could be brought before the public for denunciation and trial in any one village. The reason for this action was that during the preliminary phase of the rent reduction campaign, carried out in a few selected villages in 1953, the peasants were denouncing on the average from 10 to 15 landlords for crimes in each village.¹⁶ As the party official responsible for directing land reform operations said in April 1955, "Because of their hatred for the landowners, at first the peasants usually wanted to confiscate everything and try all landowners."¹⁷

Fearing that the denunciation of this many landlords in the villages would complicate and lengthen the land reform campaign and arouse unnecessary opposition among potential allies in the landlord class, the Political Bureau decided in August 1953 to "narrow the attack." Specifically, each village was permitted to bring no more than three landlords before such denunciation sessions. The other landlords accused of crimes were to be allowed to undergo self-criticism before the Province Administrative Committee and then to admit their mistakes before the village Congress of Peasants' Representatives, which would then demand that the landlords make restitution for any wrongs done to peasants.¹⁸

As a result of this procedure, according to this DRV account, each village in which the rent reduction campaign was carried out had an average of 2.1 landowners publicly denounced and tried. An average of 3.8 others were brought before the Congress of Peasants' Representatives on lesser charges.¹⁹ In 1875 villages the number of landowners tried for serious crimes was 3938 or 8.8% of the total number of those classified as landowners.²⁰

But, as we have already seen, only those crimes involving conspiring with the "imperialists and puppet administration," attempts on the lives of peasants or cadres, or destruction of public or peasants' property were punishable by prison terms longer than ten years. And the figures released by the DRV after the completion of the 1953-54 phase of the land reform in August 1954 show that death sentences represented under 10% of the total number of sentences handed down by the land reform courts. The statistics for 836 villages which had gone through the process of mass mobilization for land reform showed that a total of about 1350 landowners had been denounced for their crimes of whom 135 had been given death sentences, while about 1,200 were given prison terms.²¹

Hoang Van Chi's effort to portray the "quotas" as a result of Chinese Communist direction of the program must be seen in the context of the propaganda campaign carried out by the Diem government's psychological warfare organs during this period. As early as August 1954, the newly-created Diem regime was already broadcasting a wholly fabricated story of 50,000 Communist Chinese troops in North Vietnam, along with Chinese advisers who, in the words of the anonymous scriptwriter, "demanded grand receptions with beautiful girls to entertain them, rice and meat of quality, and so forth."²² The same broadcast linked the supposed Chinese menace to North Vietnam with the land reform program, citing reports of 5,000 Chinese administrative cadre preparing to go to Vietnam to train Viet Minh land reform teams.

Saigon's propaganda began claiming that the Chinese advisers were actually running the North Vietnamese government. In August 1956 Diem's embassy in Washington carried an article in its weekly bulletin, *News from Viet-Nam*, which included reports by refugees from the North of great resentment on the part of North Vietnamese people toward the "bellicose, arrogant attitude of Red Chinese cadres who are entering North Vietnam in great numbers to take up important government and army positions."²³ Thus Hoang Van Chi's first published account of the land reform, written in 1957, put the Chinese advisers in charge of the program from the beginning and controlling it "point by point," and not merely training Viet Minh cadres.²⁴

Hoang Van Chi's account of Chinese supervision over the land reform was promoted enthusiastically by certain American and British authors interested in portraying the DRV as being under Chinese influence. The mysterious William Kaye, for example, wrote that the landlords were tried "under the watchful eye of Chinese advisers."²⁵ P. J. Honey, the British specialist on Vietnam who had introduced Hoang Van Chi's book to American readers, asserted that "each of the agrarian reform teams was advised and supervised by Chinese instructors."²⁶ George Carver of the CIA repeated the argument, although with some qualification, stating that "some" of the land reform teams "almost certainly had Chinese advisers."²⁷ But even Carter apparently felt that Hoang Van Chi's allegation of the Chinese "point by point" control of the land reform program went too far.

Another class said to have been included in the DRV's plan for liquidation is the rich peasant class. According to Hoang Van Chi, this was accomplished simply by classifying all rich peasants and even "strong middle level peasants" as "landlords."²⁸ Bernard Fall made the same charge, writing that rich peasants, to whom he referred as "kulaks," were disposed of in the usual way through land reform tribunals.²⁹

In fact, during the resistance against the French, the rich peasants, like elements of the landlord class, were viewed by the party leadership as basically "anti-imperialist" and were thus allies of the party within the "National United Front."³⁰ And the rich peasant class was, in Marxist-Leninist terms, essentially "capitalist" rather than "feudal" in character, since they exploited other peasants primarily by hiring their labor rather than renting land to them.³¹ For both of these reasons, therefore, the rich peasants were not a target of the land reform campaign.

On the contrary, the policy during the land reform was summarized by the slogan "ally with the rich peasant." Even though some rich peasants had collaborated with the French, and like landlords, had abused poor peasants in the past, the Party Central Committee ordered that no rich peasants be brought before the public to be denounced. Again the purpose was to "narrow the struggle" and to concentrate exclusively on the "dishonest and wicked notables" of the landlord class.³² No land belonging to rich peasants was to be confiscated unless it was rented out to poor peasants, while the hiring of labor was to be allowed to continue. Moreover, rich peasants were then to be allowed to vote and to be elected to village people's councils.³³

Hoang Van Chi's final charge about the land reform program is that it was accompanied by a "deliberate excess of terror" which would "annihilate" any adverse reaction.³⁴ As evidence of this intention, Chi alleges that the land reform campaign used the slogan "Better kill ten innocent people than let one enemy escape."³⁵ This alleged slogan, which bears no resemblance to any public statement by the DRV or the Lao Dong Party, was first published in 1957, not in Hanoi, but in the official newspaper of Ngo Dinh Diem's National Revolutionary Movement, *Cach Mang Quoc Gia*.³⁶ It was said to have been quoted in a speech delivered in Hanoi on October 31, 1957, by Professor Nguyen Manh Tuong of the Faculty of Pedagogy of the University of Hanoi.

But although Professor Tuong did make a speech at that time, the document which Hoang Van Chi published in 1958 and cited later does not represent Tuong's own unadulterated words. For the evidence indicates that it was fabricated by the Saigon regime for psychological warfare purposes. The chief of the psychological warfare department of the Vietnamese Army at the time, Col. Nguyen Van Chau, has confirmed that the text quoted by Chi "is nothing but a false document," which



FIG. 31. — (D.) Écopé à 4 cordes, mue par des femmes. Hai nguoi tát nước gầu paddy

originated in Dr. Tran Kim Tuyen's Office of Historical and Social Studies. Col. Chan calls it "a black propaganda maneuver carried out jointly by the Americans and Vietnamese."³⁷

Chi's own testimony further undermines the document's claim to authenticity. In publishing the text of the alleged speech in *The New Class in North Vietnam*, Hoang Van Chi explained that it "fell into the hands of a Vietnamese correspondent in Rangoon who sent it to Saigon where it was published in full in many papers."³⁸ In response to questioning about this story, however, Chi admitted that he received his own original copy of the document from an official of the psychological warfare office of the Ministry of Information several months before it was published in the Saigon press.³⁹

In fact, the document appears to have been used with great effectiveness by Diem's psychological warfare specialists in persuading *Time* magazine that the land reform was carried out with a "deliberate excess of terror." *Time* used the "better kill ten innocent" slogan and attributed it to Secretary-General of the Party Truong Chinh, apparently without checking on the quotation's origin.⁴⁰ Finally it found its way into official US propaganda: the CIA's George Carver cited this alleged slogan as the one which guided the land reform program.⁴¹

The allegations which form the core of the myth of the "bloodbath" turn out upon investigation to be based on misquotation in a crucial document emanating from the Diem government rather than from Hanoi. None of these allegations is supported by a single authentic document. On the contrary, the documents which are available tell a completely different story. The land reform policy which emerges from the evidence is one characterized by caution, practicality and the desire to prevent unjust and needless loss of life or liberty.

IV. ERRORS: MYTHICAL AND REAL

Hoang Van Chi has put great emphasis on the supposed public admissions by DRV leaders and press of massive and indiscriminate executions during the land reform as irrefutable evidence that there was indeed a "bloodbath" in the North. He quotes from what he claims are DRV documents which appear to make such admission, and Bernard Fall and J. Price Gittinger have cited other such documents in characterizing the land reform. Chi and other authors have capitalized on the fact that, three months after the land reform was completed, the Lao Dong party leadership launched a major campaign for the "rectification of errors" committed during the land reform. That unprecedented campaign, which followed months of open criticism in *Nhan Dan* of the implementation of the land reform program in many areas, was begun with a series of statements by party and governmental leaders admitting that "serious mistakes" had been committed.

But it is important to examine carefully what the documents admitting these mistakes actually did say and what they did *not* say. Like his description of the party's policies regarding land reform, Chi's account of the admission of errors of the land reform systematically distorts key DRV documents.

Well before the land reform was completed at the end of July 1956, the process of correcting the mistakes of the land reform was already begun, though in an unsystematic fashion.¹ Three months after the end of the land reform campaign, however the party Central Committee began the campaign for

"rectification of errors" of the land reform, formally admitting the mistakes and placing primary responsibility for the errors on the officials assigned to supervise the whole process. As *Nhan Dan* editorialized, "The mistakes were due to shortcomings in leadership as a consequence of which a number of policies advocated either were not sufficiently concrete or were not carefully worked out." Because of "shortcomings in the guidance of the application of policies," it continued, there was "insufficient understanding of many policies of the Central Committee," and the land reform administration "formed a separate system with excessively broad powers."²

The Ministers of State for Agriculture and Interior were forced to resign. Truong Chinh, considered by the Central Committee to bear overall responsibility for the mistakes as Secretary General of the Party, submitted his resignation after undertaking self-criticism before his colleagues.³ According to the party's own account, the failure of leadership had left the way open for the least politically conscious and least reliable elements of the poor peasant class to control the conduct of the land reform program in many villages. The cause of this development is readily apparent: throughout the resistance war the tendency of party cadres had been to compromise with the wealthier rural strata, even at the expense of the poor peasants' interests. When the rent reduction and land reform campaign began, therefore, land reform cadres were urged by the party to avoid this "right deviation."⁴ As a result, the cadres swung to the other extreme of "left deviation," giving complete freedom to the poorest peasants to satisfy their immediate economic and political interests, often at the expense not only of landowners but of rich and middle peasants, including resistance fighters and party members.⁵ In the words of a later DRV account, the cadres were guilty of "following the masses" rather than "standing solidly on the position of the party."⁶

Often this meant that the land reform teams sent to the villages did not rely on local party cadres who had been trained during the resistance—even those from the poor peasant class—but turned instead to poor peasant elements who had previously been relatively inactive in the revolution.⁷ These peasants, given a significant political role in their villages for the first time, apparently abused it in a variety of ways. Guidelines put out by the Central Committee for dealing with landowners, rich peasants and middle peasants were systematically violated; proper distinctions were not made among landowners on the basis of their political attitudes; rich peasants were treated as landowners, and middle peasants were discriminated against; crop areas and land yields were overestimated and peasants often classified in a higher social stratum than was justified. Poor peasants not only denounced landowners who had committed crimes against them but also unjustly classified landowners as "dishonest and wicked notables" in order to make more land available for distribution.⁸

Similar political tendencies created serious problems for a parallel effort to reorganize local party branches by taking in large numbers of poor peasants. Many of the older, better trained party cadres were attacked by newcomers as reactionaries, forced out of the party and even jailed, with the result that some of the oldest party cells were left in disarray and some even dissolved completely.⁹

As if the combination of land reform and party

reorganization were not enough, beginning in late 1955 the land reform cadres were also given the task of uncovering "counterrevolutionaries" in the villages. Convinced that the Diem regime and its American sponsors would try to leave espionage and sabotage organizations in the North after the departure of the French Union Forces, the Central Land Reform Committee decided in August 1955 to combine the land reform campaign with "repression of counterrevolutionaries."¹⁰ And this decision exacerbated the existing tendencies of the newly powerful groups in the villages to attack already established party members as well as ordinary citizens. As the Central Committee of the Party said in its communique, "Land reform cadres wrongly estimated the force of the enemy. Many of them failed to distinguish the stubborn reactions of the most refractory elements of the landlord class from the strained and intricate situation due to the bad application of the party's line and policies."¹¹ In other words, protests against abuses by the land reform cadres too often resulted in the protesters being jailed merely on suspicion of being "counterrevolutionaries" or "saboteurs." By September 1956, the Central Committee realized that the combining of land reform and "repression of counterrevolutionaries" had been a major error which had increased the level of confusion and conflict in both land distribution and party reorganization.¹²

But although grievances caused by the errors of the land reform were widespread in the countryside, the only documented case of open violence against the DRV which has been linked to the land reform program actually occurred in mid-November, more than three months after the land reform was completed and after the "rectification of errors" had begun. The violence involved four predominantly Catholic villages in Quynh Luu district, Nghe An province, in which violations of party policy respecting freedom of worship may have further strained already tense relations between the DRV

and Catholics.¹³ But International Control Commission reports on the district suggest that, although there was widespread resentment among Catholics at having been prevented from emigrating to the South, there was no pattern of political reprisals against Catholics during the period of land reform.¹⁴

The Party leadership clearly viewed the implementation of the land reform as an administrative disaster which had caused a serious political setback in the short term. It had seriously damaged many local party branches as well as harmed the prestige of the party in general. But although the DRV government pledged to make full restitution in cases of unjust imprisonment or execution,¹⁵ there is no documentary evidence that there had been the kind of indiscriminate execution of innocent people so often alleged. Hoang Van Chi and others have not, in fact, used the actual texts of documents relating to the errors of the land reform campaign but have used instead gross mistranslations and misrepresentations of these documents.

The most serious case of such misrepresentation is Hoang Van Chi's translation of General Vo Nguyen Giap's speech of October 19, 1956, in which he discussed the resolution of the Tenth Central Committee Congress.¹⁶ This document is especially significant, because it was the first major discussion by a high party official of the mistakes committed during the land reform program. As translated by Chi, the most important passages in the speech are those in which Giap appears to admit not only that the mistakes outlined above have been committed, but also that the use of terror as well as torture and murder of innocent people were normal practices which had simply been carried too far in the land reform.

According to Chi's translation, Giap said: "We made too many deviations and executed too many honest people. We attacked on too large a front, and, seeing enemies everywhere, resorted to terror, which became far too widespread." And in

GIAP'S SPEECH ON LAND REFORM ERRORS

Mistranslations of Key Passages

VIETNAMESE TEXT*

"... không chú trọng đề phòng lệch lạc..."

"... không nhấn mạnh phải thận trọng, tránh..."

"... xử trị oan nhúng nguoi ngay..."

(not in original)

"... dùng những biện pháp tràn áp qua dang..."

"... một cách phổ biến."

"(h) ... thậm chí dùng phương pháp truy bức..."

"... để làm công tác chỉnh đốn."

ACCURATE TRANSLATION

"(We) did not pay attention to precautions against deviation, and

"... did not emphasize the necessity for caution and for avoiding..."

"... the unjust disciplining of innocent people..."

(not in original)

"... used excessive repressive measures..."

"... on a wide scale."

"... even coercive measures were used"

"... to carry out party reorganization."

CHI'S TRANSLATION

"We made too many deviations..."

(Omitted)

"and executed too many honest people..."

"... seeing enemies everywhere..."

"... resorted to terror..."

"... which became far too widespread."

"... worse still, torture..."

"... came to be regarded as normal practice during party reorganization."

* from *Nhan Dan*, October 31, 1956.

another passage, General Giap is quoted as saying: "Worse still, torture came to be regarded as a normal practice during party reorganization."

But a careful study of the original text reveals Chi's translation as a flagrant linguistic deception. An accurate translation of the first Giap statement cited above is: "We committed deviations in not emphasizing the necessity for caution and for avoiding the unjust disciplining¹⁷ of innocent people. We attacked on too wide a front, and used excessive repressive measures on a wide scale." The second passage should have been translated: "Even coercion was used in order to carry out party reorganization." Thus Chi's translation contains no less than eight significant mistranslations in three crucial sentences, which have the cumulative effect of substantially altering the meaning of Giap's statement.

In his attempt to find party documents showing



Fig. 32. — (D.) Écote à trépied. Người tát nước gàu sông.

evidence of mass executions of innocent people, Hoang Van Chi also quotes a *Nhan Dan* article as saying:

*Nghe An is the province in which party organizations existed as early as 1930. But it is in the same province that the most serious mistakes have been made, and the greatest number of party members have been executed during the land reform.*¹⁸

But the only article in *Nhan Dan* which refers to land reform in Nghe An says merely that "serious mistakes" had been committed in Interzone Four which had caused "heavy losses and pain" to the party branches in that region. The article continued:

*There are party branches established in 1930 in Nghe An and Ha Tinh, challenged during the resistance in newly liberated villages in Quang Binh, or matured in the movement to serve the front lines in Thanh Hoa, which have been dissolved.*¹⁹

Nowhere in this discussion of the mistakes committed in Nghe An and other provinces of Interzone Four—or in any other article of the period—is there any sentence remotely resembling the one quoted by Hoang Van Chi, nor is there any

reference to executions of party members.

Other American scholars misrepresented the documents dealing with the correction of errors because they could not translate the documents themselves and relied on translations provided in Saigon. It is now apparent that a number of articles in *Nhan Dan* from the 1956-57 period were seriously "doctored" in the process of translation and summarization by Vietnamese personnel.

Still another frequently-cited "fact" about the correction of errors campaign also turns out, on closer examination, to be without foundation. Hoang Van Chi claims that General Giap referred in his October 1956 speech to 12,000 party members wrongly imprisoned in the course of the land reform who would be released.²⁰ Carver also calls forth this "fact" in his denunciation of the land reform, citing the same document.²¹ But a careful reading of the original text reveals that Giap made no mention of the number of party members or prisoners unjustly jailed and about to be freed.²² In December 1956, Truong Chinh did refer to the release of 12,000 persons, but this was in the context of the government's three-phase review of all individuals imprisoned as a result of the land reform. In the first phase, those who had been wrongly arrested during the land reform and the party reorganization were released, along with all prisoners over sixty years of age; in the second phase those who had committed crimes not considered serious enough to warrant imprisonment were released; in the third phase, those who had committed serious crimes which could be commuted were released.²³ So the 12,000 figure referred not to party members imprisoned but to all those who were released from prison, for whatever reason, after the land reform.

What the documents say, in fact, is quite different from the misleading impression conveyed in the literature on the land reform. The evidence simply does not support the charge that there was a DRV policy of systematic, massive executions of innocent people.

V. THE "ESTIMATES": QUANTIFYING THE MYTH

By his systematic distortion of the basic facts of the land reform, Hoang Van Chi laid the basis for public acceptance of certain irresponsible figures on the number of deaths caused by the land reform. These figures, for which neither concrete evidence nor explanation has ever been offered, were based in each case on wholly subjective judgment, false information and assumptions.

The most frequently used figure has been the one given by Bernard Fall, who wrote: "The best-educated guesses on the subject are that probably close to 50,000 North Vietnamese were executed in connection with the land reform and that at least twice as many were arrested and sent to forced labor camps."¹ The figure of 100,000 was given by a French history teacher, Gérard Tongas, who remained in Hanoi after the Geneva Agreement. Tongas returned to Paris in 1959 to write a heavy-handed diatribe entitled, *I Lived in the Communist Hell in North Vietnam and I Chose Freedom*.² His information on the land reform appears to have been acquired from the Francophile members of the Vietnamese bourgeoisie in Hanoi, who, according to Tongas, longed for the overthrow of the DRV so that they could send their children to French schools.³ His claim of 100,000 deaths thus represents the figure circulated by those who still hoped for a return to the status quo of the colonial period.

But it remained for Hoang Van Chi himself to provide American propaganda on the land reform with its most shocking "estimate." After asserting that "nobody has been able to assess accurately the exact number of deaths" from the land reform,⁴ he casually refers in a later chapter to "the massacre of about 5 percent of the total population."⁵ Based on a total estimated population of about 13.5 million in 1956, this would have represented a total of 675,000 people.

Chi offers no justification for this allegation, but he suggests at one point that most of the deaths were those of children who starved "owing to the 'isolation policy.'"⁶ There was no such policy. As the official party organ, *Nhan Dan*, stated "... if the family is one of a dishonest and wicked notable, who has been sentenced to imprisonment, there should be no contact with the person imprisoned, but there can be visits with the other members of the family."⁷ The picture of hundreds of thousands of innocent children being systematically starved to death is so absurd, in fact, that no secondary source has dared to use it. Yet it is mainly on the basis of Chi's totally unreliable account that the President of the United States himself has told the American people that "a half a million, by conservative estimates . . . were murdered or otherwise exterminated by the North Vietnamese. . . ."⁸

As against the subjective "guesses" cited above, the statistics which have been published by the DRV, though admittedly incomplete, provide a better basis for estimating the number of executions. We have already mentioned the directive of the Lao Dong Political Bureau of August 1953 which limited the number of landlords who could be publicly denounced and tried in each village to a maximum of three. The average number of landlords denounced and tried per village in the 1,875 villages covered by the rent reduction campaign was 2.1, according to the DRV study, for a total of 3,938.⁹ It has also been pointed out that a radio broadcast at the time reported that 135 of the first 1,350 landowners denounced and tried, or about 10 percent, received the death sentence. If this proportion were generally applied in all 1,875 villages covered by the rent reduction campaign, the total number of death sentences would have been about 400.

In 1,778 other villages, the land reform was carried out without the intervening phase of mass mobilization for rent reduction. No data is available from DRV sources on the number of landlords sentenced in these villages or the proportion of those sentenced to death. The DRV's account of the land reform suggests that the most numerous mistakes of classification and of accusation were committed after June 1955 as the party's supervision of land reform teams began to lag behind the pace of implementation in newly liberated areas.¹⁰ It is worth noting, however, that even if the number of death sentences in these 1,778 villages was three times more than the number of the first 1,875, the total for the entire land reform would still have been less than 2,500. The available official documentation thus suggests that from 800 to 2,500 executions during the land reform would be a realistic estimate.

Further support for this estimate comes from a surprising source—an official document issued by the Diem government in July 1959. In its formal attack on the DRV with regard to the Geneva Agreement, the Republic of Vietnam published figures which it claimed were the total number of sentences to death and hard labor for life in several provinces during North Vietnam's land reform. The figures were as follows:¹¹

Phu Tho: 88 death sentences; 72 hard labor for life
Bac Giang: 54 death sentences; 27 hard labor for life
Thai Nguyen: 25 death sentences; 52 hard labor for life
Thanh Hoa: 98 death sentences; 134 hard labor for life

The totals for all of these four provinces, including Thanh Hoa, the most populous province in the North,¹² were thus 265 death sentences and 275 sentences of hard labor for life, or an average of 66 death sentences and 69 life sentences in each province. If these figures were indicative of the situation in the other eighteen provinces affected by the land reform, the totals would have been in the neighborhood of 1,500 executions and 1,500 life sentences, totals which would be entirely consistent with the statistics released by Hanoi.

It is not possible to judge the authenticity of the figures released by the South Vietnamese government, since no source was cited. But it is striking that the Information Ministry of a government so obviously hostile to Hanoi as the Diem government would give figures which are so low, so consistent with the DRV's figures, and so inconsistent with the myth of the "bloodbath."

CONCLUSION

Evidence shows that, although the land reform program was marred by administrative failures, its aims were to liberate the poor peasants from the threat of famine and from their total subordination to the landlords. The benefits of the land reform to the poor peasants, who made up the majority of the rural population, were a substantial increase in rice consumption and an improved social and political status in the villages. Hitherto powerless elements were encouraged for the first time to assert themselves, and although the short-term consequences were widespread abuses and conflict, even within the Lao Dong Party itself, the experiences of other nations suggest that bringing the poor peasants into the political process would be a positive development over the long run.

A determined propaganda attack against the land reform program launched by the South Vietnamese government, with



FIG. 33. — (D.) Moissonneurs. Thọ gặt, người gặt lúa.

American support, succeeded in portraying it as an excuse for ideologically-inspired mass murder. Where no evidence existed to support the "bloodbath" myth, it was created. As the U.S. government became more deeply involved in the attempt to control events in Vietnam, the myth of the "bloodbath" became increasingly useful and finally almost necessary. By the late 1960s, having been repeated by so many different sources, the myth of the "bloodbath" in North Vietnam had gained nearly universal acceptance. The President was then able to use it as a major rationale for maintaining the U.S. military presence in Vietnam.

Apart from the self-interest of officials and the incapacity of academics to do the necessary original research, however, it seems evident that the myth of the "bloodbath" in North Vietnam fits deeply-held prejudices common to most Americans. Two generations of American have been led to believe that revolutionaries guided by Marxist-Leninist concepts must be fanatical and cruel. Many Americans tended to accept that stereotype in total ignorance of the real nature of the Vietnamese revolution. Consequently this paved the way for the myth of the "bloodbath" to gain popular credence and helped stifle the search for truth. That same stereotype which belittled the intelligence, the patriotism and the humanity of the Vietnamese communist movement also made it easier for Americans to assume that it was no match for American economic and military power. It should now be clear that the U.S. can delay but cannot ultimately avoid coming to terms with the Vietnamese revolution. The abandonment of the crudely distorted portrayal of the Vietnamese Communists still prevalent in the United States should be the first step in that process.

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FIG. 34. — (D.) Battage du paddy. Người đang đập lúa và người đàn bà đang vò rơm.

comments. The author owes a special debt to Prof. David Mozingo, who has taken so much of his time to read and criticize earlier versions. These comments and criticism have saved the author from many pitfalls. The author remains solely responsible, of course, for the contents of this paper.

NOTES

I.

1. The secondary sources referring to the North Vietnamese land reform which will be cited in this study are the following: Joseph Buttinger, *Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled*, vol. II. *Vietnam at War* (New York: Praeger, 1967); George Carver, "The Faceless Viet Cong," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 44 (April 1966); Bernard Fall, *The Viet Minh Regime*, revised and enlarged edition (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1956); Fall, *The Two Vietnams* (New York: Praeger, 1963); J. Price Gittinger, "Communist Land Policy in North Vietnam," *Far Eastern Survey*, August 1959; P. J. Honey, *Communism in North Vietnam* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1963); Honey, *North Vietnam Today* (New York: Praeger, 1962).

More recently, two staff members of the Rand Corporation have referred to the land reform in the context of discussing the subject of political reprisals; see Stephen T. Hosmer, *Viet Cong Repression and its Implications for the Future* (Lexington, Mass.: Heath, 1970), pp. 46-98, and Anita Lauve Nutt, *On the Question of Communist Reprisals in Vietnam*, Rand Corporation, P-4416, August 1970.

2. Hoang Van Chi, *From Colonialism to Communism* (New York: Praeger, 1964).

3. Carver, p. 355. Carver's attempt to promote Hoang Van Chi's account of the land reform is especially significant in that Carver tried to conceal his own affiliation with the U.S. government in writing the article. The fact that Carver was a CIA official was revealed only later by Senator J. William Fulbright.

4. See the interview with Hoang Van Chi published in the Agency for International Development's in-house newsletter, *Front Lines*, February 24, 1972.

5. Interview with Hoang Van Chi, AID Washington Training Center, May 26, 1972.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Hoang Van Chi, *The New Class in North Vietnam* (Saigon: Cong Dan, 1958).

8. Interview with Hoang Van Chi.

9. See *New York Times*, April 27, 1966.

10. *Ibid.*, September 28, 29, 1966.

11. *Front Lines*, February 24, 1972.

12. *CORDS Training Book*, p. 3.

II.

1. The land reform program is sometimes confused with the later phase of North Vietnamese agricultural policy in which cooperatives were established; hence the alleged "bloodbath" may be associated in some minds with the later "collectivization" program in the rural areas. But that phase did not begin until November 1958, nearly two and a half years after the end of the land reform process. The allegations of a "bloodbath," therefore, have nothing to do with the "collectivization" of agriculture. In contrast to the land reform, the campaign to establish cooperatives was gradual and noncoercive. This analysis concerns only the land reform program which began in 1953 and was completed in 1956.

2. Pierre Gourou, *Land Utilization in French Indochina*, translation of *L'Utilisation du sol en Indochine française*, (New York, 1945) Part II, pp. 276 ff. cited in Erich H. Jacoby, *Agrarian Unrest in Southeast Asia*, 2nd ed. (London: Asia Publishing House, 1961), p. 157.

3. Gourou, *The Peasants of the Tonkin Delta* (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files, 1955), p. 280.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Yves Henry, *Economie agricole de L'Indochine* (Hanoi: Gouvernement Generale de l'Indochine, 1932), pp. 108 and 110.

6. See Pham Cao Doung, *Thuc Trang cua Gioi Nong Dan Viet Nam duoi Thoi Phap Thuoc* (*The True Situation of the Vietnamese Peasants under French Colonialism*), (Saigon: Nha Sach Khai Tri, 1965), pp. 104-105.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 286.



FIG. 35. — (D.) Vannage. Người sảy thóc lúa bằng nia.

8. Tran Phuong, ed., *Cach Mang Ruong Dat (Agrarian Revolution in Vietnam)*. (Hanoi: Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1968), table no. 8, p. 14.

9. See Henry, p. 112; Pham Cao Duong, pp. 74-83; Nguyen Huu Khang, *La Commune Annamite* (Paris: Librairie du Recueil Sirey, 1946), p. 54. For specific cases of such exploitation of communal lands by local notables under the French see the richly documented study by Truong Chinh and Vo Nguyen Giap, first published in 1937, *Van De Dan Cay (The Peasant Problem)*, Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Su That, 1959), second printing, pp. 122-123.

10. Tran Phuong, *loc. cit.*

11. Le Hoai Tuyen, "Complete the Reduction of Rents, Carry out the Reduction of Debts," *Su That (The Truth)*, no. 135, June 15, 1950, in *Cuoc Khang Chien Than Thanh cua Nhan Dan Viet Nam (The Magnificent Resistance War of the Vietnamese People)*, (Hanoi: Su That, 1960), vol. II, p. 391.

12. Tran Phuong, "The Land Reform," *Pages of History, 1945-54*, Vietnamese Studies, No. 7, 1966, p. 187.

13. "Improving the Life of the Peasants," *Sinh Hoat Noi Bo (Internal Activities)*, No. 7, April 1948, in *Cuoc Khang Chien*, Vol. II, p. 34.

14. Le Hoai Tuyen, p. 392.

15. For a study which assumes the economic rationality of the land reform, however, see Christine Pelzer White, *Land Reform in North Vietnam*, Agency for International Development Spring Review, Country Paper, June 1970.

16. Bernard Fall, *The Viet Minh Regime*, p. 118.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *The Agriculture of French Indochina*, U.S. Department of Agriculture, August 1950 (mimeo), p. 11. Despite this caveat, the same source nevertheless ventures the opinion that Tonkin could be considered as a country of "small peasants who till their own land" — a misleading representation of the land tenure system.

19. Fall, *loc. cit.* Even this statistic was used by another writer hostile to the land reform to show that there were few landlords to be confiscated in the North. Joseph Buttinger writes that "more than 60 percent of all land was in the hands of peasants owning around one acre," a statement which was wrong on two counts: first the statistic cited by Fall does not refer to land area but to landowners, and secondly, it specifically states that 61% of them owned less than one acre, not "around" one acre. Buttinger seems to have been unaware of the economic significance of a plot of less than one acre. See Joseph Buttinger, *Vietnam, A Dragon Embattled*, Vol. II; (New York: Praeger, 1967), p. 912.

20. Bernard Fall, "A 'Straight Zigzag': The Road to Socialism in North Vietnam," *Communist Strategies in Asia*, A. Doak Barnett, ed. (New York: Praeger, 1963), p. 216.

21. Chi, *From Colonialism to Communism*, p. 149.

22. George Carver, "The Faceless Viet Cong," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (April 1966), p. 353.

23. Fall, *The Two Viet-Nams* (New York: Praeger, 1964), p. 159.

24. *Ibid.*

25. Fall, *The Viet Minh Regime*, p. 116.

26. *Republic of Vietnam Nutritional Survey, October-December 1959*. U.S. Interdepartmental Committee on Nutrition for National Defense, Saigon, July 1960. Cited in Timothy Hallinan, *Economic Prospects of the Republic of Vietnam*, Rand Corporation Paper, P-4225, November 1969, p. 8.

27. *Enquête sur la consommation du riz et des conditions sanitaires*, Institut de la Statistique, Republic of Vietnam, August 1963, p. 8.

28. *Agricultural Economy of North Vietnam*, Economic Research Service, Foreign Regional Analysis Division, U.S. Department of Agriculture (Washington, D.C., 1965), p. 19.

29. Henry, p. 334.

III

1. Hoang Van Chi, *From Colonialism to Communism*, p. 158.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

3. See the communique of the Lao Dong Party Central Committee Vietnam News Agency, Radio Hanoi, October 29, 1956. The slogan "Overthrow the reactionary traitors and cruel notables" was also used until after the Geneva Agreement, but this is quite different from "Liquidate the landlords." See Tran Phuong (ed.), *Cach Mang Ruong Dat*, pp. 115 and 141.

4. *Nhan Dan*, June 1-5, 1953, in *Cuoc Khang Chien*, pp. 57-58.

5. Tran Phuong (ed.), *Cach Mang Ruong Dat*, p. 144.

6. Speech by Ho Viet Thang, chairman of the Central Land Reform Committee, *Nhan Dan*, April 6, 1955.

6a. *Cach Mang Ruong Dat*, p. 158.

7. *Lay Ruong Cua Ai? Chia Ruong Cho Ai? (Whose Land Will Be Taken? To Whom Will It Be Given?)*, National Peasants' Liaison Committee, Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Hanoi, 1954. Translated in *Planning for Land Reform*, Translation Series No. 21, Institute of Advanced Projects, East-West Center, Honolulu, 1967, p. 52.

8. The complete text of the decree may be found in M. A. Gel'fer, *Criminal Legislation in Foreign Socialist States* (Moscow: State Publishing House of Juridical Literature, 1957), pp. 88-89. Translated by *Joint Publications Research Service*, December 5, 1958 (DC-408).

9. Tran Phuong, ed., *Cach Mang Ruong Dat*, pp. 129-130. Anita Lauve Nutt of the RAND Corporation has argued that the land reform program was merely a cover for political reprisals against those who had worked for the French. *On the Question of Communist Reprisals in Vietnam*, RAND Corporation P-4416, August 1970, p. 4. But like Hoang Van Chi and Bernard Fall, she seriously distorts a major document of the land reform. She asserts that the Population Classification Decree of 1953 "clearly indicated that all 'wicked landowners' who had to be eliminated were also 'traitors,' i.e., French collaborators." The reader will find no such indication in the decree, which is published in full in Fall, *The Viet Minh Regime*, Appendix IV, pp. 172-178.

10. *Lay Ruong Cua Ai?*, *loc. cit.*; see also *Nhan Dan*, January 23, 1956.

11. *Time*, July 1, 1957, p. 27.

12. Hoang Van Chi, *The New Class in North Vietnam*, pp. 5-7.

13. William Kaye, "A Bowl of Rice Divided: The Economy of North Vietnam," in Honey (ed.), *North Vietnam Today*, p. 107.

14. Carver, p. 353.

15. Fall, *The Two Viet-Nams*, p. 155. Although Fall did not cite any source for his "landlord quota" charge in this popular American work, he had cited Mr. Chi's *The New Class in North Vietnam* as a primary source on the land reform in North Vietnam earlier in French. See Fall, *Le Viet Minh* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1960), p. 291, note 35.

16. Tran Phuong, ed., *Cach Mang Ruong Dat*, p. 125.

17. Speech by Ho Viet Thang, in *Nhan Dan*, April 6, 1955.

18. Tran Phuong, ed., *Cach Mang Ruong Dat*, p. 125. Only those villages which had a population of more than 10,000 people were allowed to bring four or five landlords before public denunciation sessions. (The average population of a village in North Vietnam is approximately 3,000 people.)

19. *Ibid.*, p. 126. The figure of 2.1 public denunciations for the average village during the mass mobilization for rent reduction is consistent with figures for several provinces published at the time. In Thanh Hoa province, where Hoang Van Chi was teaching school in 1954, it was reported that in 78 villages a total of 187 "dishonest and wicked notables" had been denounced for their crimes," while in Nghe An and Ha Tinh, a total of 189 landowners were denounced publicly.

Dividing the total numbers of landlords denounced by the number of villages, we get averages of 2.4 per village in Thanh Hoa and 2.2 per village in Nghe An and Ha Tinh. *Nhan Dan*, April 1-3, 1954, and August 1-3, 1954.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Radio Hanoi, August 25, 1954, cited in J. Price Gittinger, "Communist Land Reform in North Vietnam," p. 116. *Nhan Dan*, August 13-18, 1954, reported figures of 1,215 landowners denounced publicly in 826 villages.

22. Saigon Radio, August 6, 1954.

23. *News from Viet-Nam*, August 4, 1956.

24. Cf. note 12.



FIG. 36. — (D.) Décorticage du paddy. *Xay lúa.*

25. Kaye, *loc. cit.*

26. P. J. Honey, *Communism in North Vietnam*, p. 12.

27. Carver, *loc. cit.*

28. Chi, *From Communism to Colonialism*, p. 166.

29. Fall, "A 'Straight Zigzag,'" p. 217.

30. A major party document dated 1948 described the party's policy toward rural classes during the resistance with the following slogan: "Rely on the middle poor peasants, unite with the rich peasants, isolate the landowners and oppose the French imperialists." See "Tinh Hinh va Nhiem Vu De Cuong Dua Ra Dai Hoi Toan Quoc" (Situation and Tasks to be Presented to the National Congress), in *Documents on Vietnamese Communism*, Wason Film, 2584, Cornell University Library.

31. Tran Phuong, ed., *Cach Mang Ruong Dat*, pp. 142-143; Tran Phuong, "The Land Reform," *Pages of History*, p. 183; *Nhan Dan*, September 11-15, 1953, in *Cuoc Khang Chien*, p. 121.

32. Tran Phuong, ed., *Cach Mang Ruong Dat*, p. 125.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 144; *Nhan Dan*, June 1-5, 1953, in *Cuoc Khang Chien*, p. 58.

34. Hoang Van Chi, *From Colonialism to Communism*, p. 211.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 167 and 213.

36. Hoang Van Chi, *The New Class in North Vietnam*, p. 134.

37. Letter to the author, November 25, 1972, from Olivet, France. For Chau's revelations concerning documents forged by U.S. and Diemist agencies during the period, see *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 24, 1972, p. 2.

38. Hoang Van Chi, *loc. cit.*

39. Interview with Hoang Van Chi, May 26, 1972.

40. *Time*, July 1, 1957, p. 26.

41. Carver, p. 355.

IV.

1. See for examples, *Nhan Dan*, June 29, 1956; August 20, 1956; August 24, 1956, September 6, 1956; September 8, 1956.

2. *Nhan Dan*, October 30, 1956, carried by Vietnam News Agency, Hanoi Radio, October 30, 1956.

3. *Ibid.*

4. See for example, the article "Correct Mistakes of Rightist Thinking" in *Nhan Dan*, January 13, 1956.

5. Tran Phuong, ed., *Cach Mang Ruong Dat*, p. 197.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 190-191. *Nhan Dan*, August 24, 1956 and October 30, 1956.

9. *Nhan Dan*, July 2, 1956; October 7, 1956, November 22, 1956, Vietnam News Agency, Radio Hanoi, November 1, 1956.

10. Tran Phuong, ed., *Cach Mang Ruong Dat*, p. 187. This campaign to uncover subversives in the newly liberated areas, although exaggerated and ultimately self-defeating, was based on real fears of sabotage of the land reform campaign by agents of the Diem government or the Americans. In March 1956, *Nhan Dan* reported that in Ha Dong province someone was "spreading the rumor that U.S.-Diem troops are about to come, and you'll have to move again, so the land reform is not final." *Nhan Dan*, March 2, 1956.

11. Communiqué of the Central Committee, October 29, 1956, Vietnam News Agency, Radio Hanoi, October 29, 1956.

12. *Cach Mang Ruong Dat*, p. 188.

13. For the official DRV version of the event, see Vietnam News Agency, Radio Hanoi, November 16, 1956; for the Diem government view, see *News from Viet-Nam*, December 1, 1956, p. 3. Saigon claimed that "several hundred" people were killed by government troops during the fighting, while Hanoi claimed "a few" persons were killed or wounded. According to Vietnamese who escaped from Quynh Luu to the South and were interviewed by American officials, "several hundred persons were injured but only a few killed," and troops brought in to put down the uprising "fired their guns at the insurgents only a few times and fought largely with rifle butts and bayonets." UPI dispatch from Saigon, *Bangkok Post*, November 29, 1956.

14. *Eighth Interim Report of the International Commission for Supervision and Control in Vietnam* (Vietnam No. 1 [1958] Command Paper, 509). London: Great Britain Parliamentary Sessional Papers, XXX (1957/58), p. 8.

15. See the statement by the DRV government before the 6th Meeting of the National Assembly, *Nhan Dan*, January 4, 1957.

16. Hoang Van Chi, *From Colonialism to Communism*, pp. 209-210. Chi inaccurately refers to it as a speech read before the 10th Congress of the Central Committee. In fact, it was read before a public meeting of the citizens of Hanoi, according to the official text in *Nhan Dan*, October 31, 1956.

17. Not only the authoritative dictionary published in Hanoi but the pattern of actual usage of the term *xu tri* leave no room for doubt that the word was used to mean "to discipline" or "to punish" and not as a euphemism for "execute." The dictionary defines it as synonymous with "to discipline." Van Tan, *Tu Dien Tieng Viet (Dictionary of the Vietnamese Language)*, (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1967), p. 1167.

Moreover, in the same speech by Giap, the following passage illustrates its unambiguous meaning: "Cadres and people mistakenly disciplined (*bi xu tri*) are all to be rectified: politically, they are to have their rights, honor and responsibilities restored. Those who were unjustly imprisoned are to be freed. Economically, they are to be appropriately compensated and helped to make a living." The story on To Hieu village also describes the party secretary as having been "disciplined [*bi xu tri*], arrested and jailed," then freed. (*Nhan Dan*, August 24, 1956.)

18. *From Colonialism to Communism*, p. 225.

19. *Nhan Dan*, November 22, 1956. There was no article even vaguely resembling the one described by Hoang Van Chi in the November 21 issue cited in his footnote.

20. Hoang Van Chi, *From Colonialism to Communism*, p. 214.

21. Carver, *loc. cit.*

22. *Nhan Dan*, October 31, 1956.

23. *Thoi Moi*, December 4, 1956.

V.

1. Fall, *The Two Viet-Nams*, p. 159.

2. Gérard Tongas, *J'ai Vécu dans l'Enfer Communiste au Nord Vietnam et J'ai Choisi la Liberté* (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Debresse, 1960).

3. *Ibid.*, p. 353. Not only his affinity for the French-speaking



FIG. 37. — (D.) Blanchissage du riz. Người giã gạo và người gạn gạo.

bourgeoisie but his undisguised contempt for non-Francophile Vietnamese colored Tongas' attitude toward the DRV. Tongas once

commented, "The cultural level of North Vietnam is undoubtedly one of the lowest imaginable." Tongas, "Indoctrination Replaces Education," in Honey, ed., *North Vietnam Today*, p. 93.

4. Hoang Van Chi, *From Colonialism to Communism*, p. 166.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 212.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

7. *Nhan Dan*, August 6, 1956. This allegation is further contradicted by Chi's own admission, thirty pages later, that there were few landlord families who could not get money from friends or relatives who were tradesmen or officials. *From Colonialism to Communism*, p. 196.

8. President Nixon's Press Interview, April 16, 1971 (official White House text). President Nixon has escalated his own rhetoric on the "bloodbath" in North Vietnam by multiplying the number of deaths as the argument became increasingly crucial to the rationale for American policy in Vietnam. In 1969 he used Bernard Fall's figure of 50,000 deaths (President Nixon's Radio/TV address, November 3, 1969, official White House text). In 1971, he used the 500,000 figure cited above. But on July 27, 1972, the President reached a new level of rhetoric, declaring that more than one half million people were assassinated and another half a million died in "slave labor camps" in North Vietnam (*New York Times*, July 28, 1972). An inquiry to the National Security Council produced only a list of references of which Hoang Van Chi's "5 percent" figure was the only primary source. His own staff was thus unable to explain how he arrived at his new total of one million deaths from the North Vietnamese land reform.

9. See notes 19 and 20, Section III.

10. Tran Phuong, ed., *Cach Mang Ruong Dat*, p. 131.

11. *Violations of the Geneva Agreements by the Viet-Minh Communists*, Ministry of Information, Republic of Vietnam (Saigon, July 1959), pp. 94-95.

12. 1960 Population Figures by Province (from Central Census Steering Committee, 1961), *Nhan Dan*, November 2, 1960. (Translated by JPRS, 6570, January 13, 1961).

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