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FROM OUR READERS

I am delighted with **Vietnam Magazine** and **Vietnam Report**. Both are excellently edited and presented and contain very informative material. I place these publications in the reading room of the Lahore Press Club for the benefit of brother journalists.

Some journalist friends have urged me to visit Saigon, but foreign exchange denied by the State Bank of Pakistan on the ground that no visa arrangements exist between our two countries prevented a visit to Saigon I was contemplating last August in my desire to see your land and people.

I hope that some day our two governments be wise enough to exchange diplomatic relations so that our peoples can visit each other.

We must try to persuade them to consider having these relations. Some useful material on this subject would help the endeavors of my friends here.

AMANULLAH
37-A Rasool Park
Lahore. Pakistan

I have just received a copy of the book "Awards and Decorations of Vietnam." I must say that I believe the book to be one of the finest books on decorations I have seen.

It is my intention to write a review on your book and have it published in several Canadian and U.S. magazines. As each review is published, I will send you a copy.

The quality of the publication is also excellent. I would be interested in finding out the cost of such a publication. I write books and find it very expensive to produce a good quality book. If I can get some estimates that are favourable, I would consider having my books published in Vietnam.

In Canada. I am known as a writer of military awards and badges. Also I have a large collection of Canadian and foreign medals and badges. This collection travels across Canada on exhibit to the public. I have enclosed a copy of my first book.

Since seeing your book, I have decided to put together a set of Vietnam medals, properly displayed, to travel with my collection. As such I would ask if you could help me to obtain or purchase the Orders, Decorations and Medals illustrated in your book. Appropriate credit would be given to the government of Vietnam, as well as your Council.

J. C. THOMPSON
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VIETNAM *Magazine*

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Cover: The Saigon Museum, repository of relics of Indo-chinese history. Appropriately, it is located in the Saigon zoo compound which is rich with its exhibits of Indo-chinese flora and fauna.

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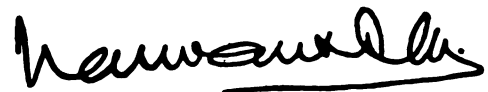
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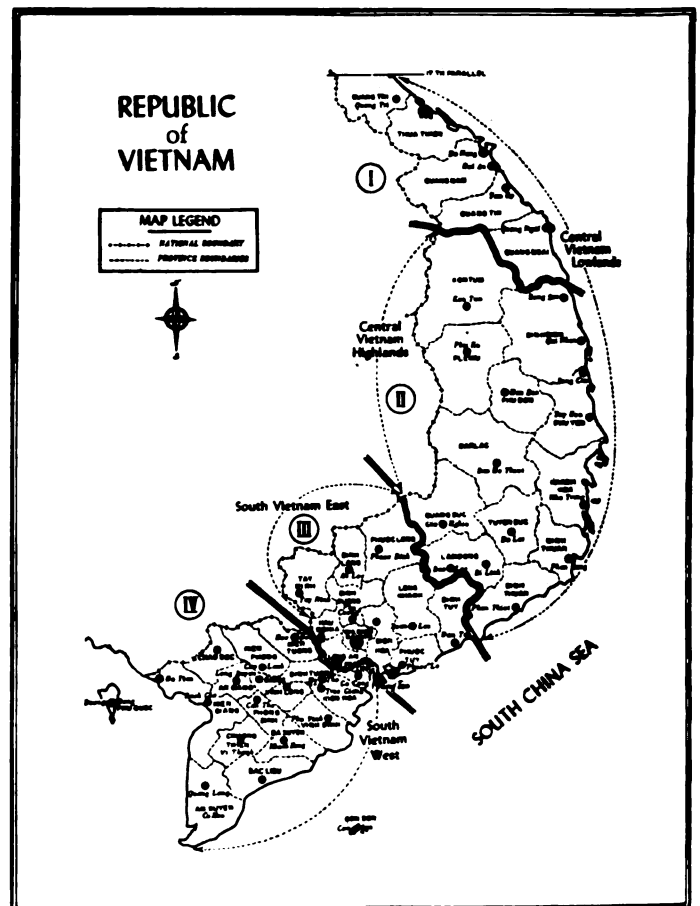
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If you would like to learn more about our activities, we indeed would be pleased to hear from you.



President
TRAN VAN LAM



A RETURN TO INDOCHINA

WILL THE FRENCH DO IT?

By VU TRINH

Ever since the Paris Cease-fire Agreement of January 28, 1973, there have been speculations about a French "return" to Indochina. Some observers consider these speculations to be sheer rumor and fantasy. Others take a different view in light of the present social-economic-political realities here.

No one, of course, is expecting regiments of French paratroopers, Foreign Legionnaires or colonial administrators. But certain signs suggest, cautiously, that the stage may be ready for a new era of French non-military participation here. These signs have to do with history, with Vietnam's economic needs and with France's politico-economic needs for her role in the international arena.

Start of Thaw

The thaw in Saigon-Paris relations began last year with the exchange of ambassadors. Jean-Marie Mérillon became the first French ambassador here in eight years. In 1965 Nguyen Cao Ky, then Prime Minister, had severed relations with France when President Charles De Gaulle announced French "neutrality" in the Indochina conflict.

Soon after Monsieur Mérillon's installation, Francoise Misoffe, French National Assembly member and former Minister in Charge of Overseas Territories, made a 10-day tour here with an official delegation studying the matter of economic aid. French assistance has not yet increased to the level that some officials here were hoping for, but promises were made that economic aid will become a "fixture" of the French National Budget.

As for private investment, many

French remain cautious about a "new participation" here. Yet, in December, 1972, before the cease-fire agreement was announced, the leading French economic daily, *La Vie Française*, featured a lengthy report that strongly advocated a French return. The detailed article concluded on this note:

"These are dreams, but everything indicates that the opportunity to 'return' to Indochina is being offered to us. It's by no means so absurd an idea."

The era of French colonialism is long gone, but a French resident here who meets many writers and visitors from France said, "The French never forget Indochina and they keep coming back."

Well-informed sources emphasize the economic and political reasons for renewed French interest. France's desire to re-assert herself in Asia, they say, stems

partly from a fear of seeing the world carved up by the super-powers.

Devaluations of the American dollar, making the franc relatively stronger, have given France new economic leverage for making initiatives. The French say they are in Southeast Asia now without a superiority complex, an inferiority complex or an anti-American attitude. As for the bitter taste left over from colonialism, it's pointed out that France, despite its bloody Algerian war, now maintains a large assistance program and friendly relations with independent Algeria.

Stress on Loans

But France does not yet have the will or the capacity to institute a really large assistance program here. It is likely to stress loans



Trucks being loaded at BGI firm, largest French firm in South Vietnam.

... they have never really left

and non-monetary assistance. One example is the French Government's offer of a 135-million franc loan to expand the Ha Tien Cement Factory's annual capacity from 300,000 to one million tons.

The slow pace of French-Vietnamese *rapprochement* may make it surprising to learn, however, that the French are still the most active foreigners in South Vietnam's private sector. In recent years this very basic fact was somewhat submerged under the tidal wave of Japanese imports and U.S.-Government financed projects. But as one French writer put it, despite the French military disaster in 1954, "there has never been an economic Dien Bien Phu."

French activity in South Vietnam today continues to outstrip the private commercial activity of all other foreigners, including the Americans, Japanese and Koreans. French enterprises, for example, account for 20% of all tax revenues the Government collects. No other foreign group pays nearly this much.

France, since 1956, is no longer the leading supplier of imported goods here (the United States leads, followed by Japan), but its number-four position is very close to Taiwan's number three.

"Have Roots Here"

An American business analyst in Saigon offered a key reason for French commercial tenacity:

"The French have roots here."

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Saigon lists 95 private American companies operating in Vietnam. The French Chamber of Commerce lists 90 French companies. The French employ more than 30,000 Vietnamese (including rubber plantation workers). The Americans employ about half that number (if one excludes the U.S.-Government contracted firms).

Eight French companies still control 90% of all rubber production in Vietnam. Prior to 1972, despite war damage, these com-

panies were still cultivating 40,000 of their 56,000 hectares.

The second, third, fourth and fifth largest foreign firms here are American: Esso, Foremost Dairy Products, Caltex and Shell respectively. The largest of all firms is French—B.G.I. (Brasseries et Glacières de l'Indochine), which makes beer and soft drinks.

Three French banks account for 15% of the total volume of banking business here. This figure puts them well ahead of the three American banks: Chase Manhattan, Bank of America, and the First National City Bank.

Parisian firms—especially Crédit Foncier de l'Indochine—own a great deal of real estate and property in Saigon and other Vietnamese cities.

The bulk of international commercial flights to and from Saigon is handled by Air France and the French UTA.

Extensive Manufacture

Unlike other foreigners here, the French manufacture extensively.

Their products include soap, radios, shoes, cement, beer, pharmaceuticals, motor cars, cigarettes, matches, textiles, small tires and powdered milk (this latter by Denis Frères in 20% association with U.S.-owned Foremost).

"The Americans," a U.S. official explained, "are mainly in service, trade and insurance fields (exclusive of Government-invited contractors)."

There are about 3,000 French expatriates residing here today, and 4,000 children born from their marriages with Vietnamese.

Cultural Presence

There is a continuing French cultural presence here too, in the form of art exhibits, films and concerts. The French government still administers a number of primary and secondary schools throughout the country. The three French schools in Saigon—Marie Curie, Centre Scolaire Colette and Centre Scolaire Saint Exupéry—teach 2,000 children, using the French language exclusively except for



France has offered a 135-million franc loan to Ha Tien Cement (above).

Vietnamese pupils. (Saigon Government regulations require additional instruction for the Vietnamese in their native language).

Since the diffusion of English during the past decade, French is no longer the "second mother tongue" of Vietnam. But some Frenchmen are urging their Government to finance a re-assertion of the French language here. A debate on this matter continues within French circles.

Some observers believe that old ties and French cultural influence, which helped give Indochina its distinctive flavor in Asia, will help pave the way for a "new participation." Practically all of the influential Vietnamese have a personal "French connection," from the present or the past. Even many of today's younger technocrats and officials, in addition to U.S. school- ing, have studied in France.

In the competition for influence in post-war Vietnam, informed observers see a certain advantage

in France's relative economic weakness *vis-à-vis* Japan. France, the Vietnamese believe, will be in no position to dominate Indochina.

Cautious Pace

France is giving equal diplomatic treatment to the North and South although, according to an informed source, there are only "about seventeen Frenchmen living in North Vietnam today."

France is proceeding cautiously in Vietnam for various reasons: colonial memories, hopes for a vast market in mainland China (illusionary hopes, some say), and concern over the continued fighting here.


French opinion seems divided on the final outcome of the struggle in Vietnam. There are optimists and pessimists. But the French who are already doing business here show no signs of slackening off. One French bank in Saigon has opened five local branches in recent years.

Will the French "return" to Indochina?

The answer cannot be definite yet, but in some respects the French never left. ●

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Grandma's stories

THE HERO WHO LOVED A SERPENT

By **NGHIEM XUAN THIEN**

The following legend is interesting because it has a historical background. It concerns a Vietnamese national hero, Nguyen Trai, who helped Le Loi, founder of the second Le dynasty, fight the Chinese for 10 years to complete victory, making Vietnam an independent country until the coming of the French.

Nguyen Trai was born about the year 1380 in the village of Nhi Khe, Ha Dong province, North Vietnam. He was graduated as Doctor of Literature during the Ho dynasty and was appointed a censor in the royal court. When the Ho dynasty collapsed, he retired to his estate at Con Son in Chi Linh district, Hai Duong province. Con Son was a hill in a picturesque mountainous country where brush-wood grew everywhere.

Nguyen Trai's father, Nguyen Phi Khanh, fought against the Chinese army sent by the Minh emperor to conquer Vietnam. Together with his two eldest sons (Nguyen Trai was the third), Nguyen Phi Khanh was taken prisoner and ordered brought to China while locked with his two sons in a strong wooden cage.

Father's Final Request

Having paid a bribe, Nguyen Trai was allowed to follow them from a distance and at times was allowed to tend to their needs. At the frontier, Nguyen Trai had to part with them. The farewell was very painful, all being aware of the fate that awaited the father and two sons. Nguyen Phi Khanh gave his still free son his blessings and as a final request asked Nguyen Trai to avenge him and his two brothers.

Back in his estate in Con Son, Nguyen Trai planned his revenge. In the meantime, he opened a

school. Such was his reputation among the educated class that his school attracted a great number of students. Unable to accommodate all of them in the few rooms of his house, he decided to build a spacious schoolhouse with the help of his students who volunteered to work at the construction. A large piece of land was chosen and the students started to clear it of brush-wood.

The Dream

During this particular phase of the work, Nguyen Trai had a dream one night. In the dream, he saw a young woman cast herself at his feet, imploring: "Pity, my Lord, pity me and my young children. Please stop your work for a few days to give us time to move to another place."

It was late when Nguyen Trai woke up and the sun was already high in the sky. Attaching no importance to the dream, he dressed leisurely and proceeded to the work site. After the eldest among the students who was discharging the role of foreman had reported to him on the progress of the clearing operation, Nguyen Trai casually inquired if anything out of the ordinary had occurred at the site.

The student-foreman had nothing of the sort to report, but said that since the lot was large, its clearing would only be completed after one more month of work.

All of a sudden, the student tapped his forehead with his right forefinger and apologized to his master for failing to remember an incident early that morning. He reported that the students removing a bush saw a big white serpent dart out. They pursued it in the effort to kill it but only succeeded in cutting off its tail. It disappeared among the brush-wood, leaving behind two eggs which the students put in a small wooden bowl. When Nguyen Trai saw the serpent's eggs he remembered his dream.

No Ordinary Serpent

That was no ordinary serpent, he thought. It was the serpent who had appeared before him in the form of a woman in his dream. It had begged for time to allow the eggs to hatch, after which she could move to another place.

Since the students were unable to kill the serpent and did not destroy the eggs, Nguyen Trai felt the harm done was not irreparable. He ordered the students to keep the eggs in a warm place and not damage them in any way.

That same day while reading a book while lying on a sofa after partaking of lunch, Nguyen Trai was startled by a noise coming from the roof. He looked up and saw a long, white serpent with a bleeding tail among the rafters. A drop of blood fell on his book and the serpent slid away.

Nguyen Trai noticed that the drop of blood had fallen on a word meaning generation and had pene-

A drop of blood drops on a book

the second Le dynasty which ruled over Vietnam for nearly 400 years (1428-1787).

As a reward for invaluable services rendered during the war of independence Nguyen Trai was made a count. As Count of Te Van he enjoyed great favor from the king himself and was accorded high respect by his colleagues and mandarins at the royal court.

Le Loi's reign was brief. He died in 1433 at the age of 48, five years after his triumph. Nguyen Trai, who was older than Le Loi by five years, continued serving Le Loi's son who ascended the throne at the age of 11 under the name Le Thai Tong.

One of Le Loi's top generals, Le Sat, was appointed regent. The practically illiterate Le Sat did not know how to handle power and was a very cruel, arrogant, and suspicious man. Any man he suspected of having an independent mind, he ordered quickly eliminated.

Thai Tong, although young in years, could not bear the insolence and malevolence of Le Sat. Thai Tong ordered him killed and assumed control of power.

Continued Confidence

Although many of his colleagues who had valiantly fought the Chinese during the war were successively sentenced to death by Le Loi himself towards the end of his reign, Nguyen Trai continued to enjoy the respect and confidence of all.

It is not rare in Vietnamese as well as Chinese history that men who had helped founders of dynasty with great peril to their lives were subsequently sentenced to death, sometimes together with their families, by order of the king or his successors. After their services on the battlefield were over, these men who had helped install a leader on the throne and who were supposed to enjoy great respect of the king found such respect and favor more of a liability than an asset, invariably facing the prospect of being liquidated.

Nguyen Trai was not oblivious of such an ironic fate which had befallen some of his former comrades-in-arms. He repeatedly expressed his intention to retire, but was always refused.

One spring afternoon, while on leave, Nguyen Trai mounted his chariot and escorted by armed guards on horseback left the Citadel where the king, his family, his court, and all ranking dignitaries and their families lived in palaces on a wide area surrounded by thick walls and deep moats.

They were leaving the royal capital of Thang Long (former name of Hanoi) which then was a mere cluster of brick and stone houses and humble



A drop of blood from serpent falls on Nguyen Trai's book.

trated three pages of the porous paper used at the time to facilitate writing with a hair brush.

At once it dawned on Nguyen Trai that the serpent had given him a warning: it would exact revenge from him up to his third generation.

A few days later two white serpents hatched from the eggs in the wooden bowl. Nguyen Trai ordered to set them free on the spot where their mother disappeared among the brush-wood. Soon everybody forgot about the serpent and her young, particularly Nguyen Trai whose principal obsession was driving out the Chinese from Vietnam.

Joins Le Loi

One day, Nguyen Trai heard about a man named Le Loi, a rich farmer from Lam Son village in Thanh Hoa province, who was rallying his countrymen for a war of independence against the invading Chinese. He disbanded his school and went to Thanh Hoa to join Le Loi who was quick to recognize Nguyen Trai's talent and qualities of leadership and made him his top adviser.

After a difficult 10-year war, the Chinese were driven out of the country and Le Loi ascended the throne under the name Le Thai To, founding thus

Nguyen Trai meets a talented lass

huts made of mud and straw. Trade at that time was already very active, and merchants and craftsmen were organized into guilds which occupied designated areas of the capital, which rendered it easy for prospective buyers to know where to go.

Passing through the north gate of the citadel, Nguyen Trai's escort immediately headed for the favorite haunts of Nguyen Trai, two great lakes situated not far from the capital. The larger one was called Tay Ho or Lake of the West and the other Truc Bach. These two lakes were separated one from the other by a strip of land some one hundred meters wide.

The sun was beginning to decline and the air chilly when Nguyen Trai and his retinue passed the Temple of the Genie Protector of the Capital and proceeded to the road running between the two lakes.

Beyond the waters of the Great Lake to the left was the province of Son Tay, some 40 kilometers away. Nguyen Trai's thoughts turned to two Vietnamese heroines, the Trung sisters who fought 400 years before against the Chinese army led by a great general of the Han dynasty. They had been queens for three years after driving out the first Chinese occupation army. Then the more numerous and better trained enemy drove them to the yonder bank of the lake. Completely surrounded, the two sisters threw themselves into the lake and were drowned.

Thoughts of 2 Heroines

In the rustle of the breeze, Nguyen Trai seemed to hear the din of battle, the clash of swords, the rattling of armor, the cries of the wounded and the moanings of the dying. His heart beat fast whenever he saw the lake and he could not help but think of the tragic death of the two heroines which had made the place a pilgrimage site. Often he had visited the place with pious admiration.

Sometimes, lost in his thoughts, he seemed to see the Trung sisters seated on the nape of their elephants harnessed for battle, rising from the clear waters and soaring into the sky, enveloped in an immense cloud of smoke rising from incense burned by the Vietnamese over the years in their honor.

Grey smoke began to emanate from the roofs of houses, most of them thatched huts, along the lake banks, indicating that people were preparing their evening meal. Blue shadows were slowly spreading over the landscape and the horizon gradually changed its hue from yellow to pink.

Nguyen Trai was about to order his retinue to return to the capital when he saw a fine silhouette advancing in his direction. It was that of a girl carrying something on her back. At the sight of the men

and horses, the girl stopped, hesitated, showed fright and retraced her steps.

Though in his late fifties, Nguyen Trai had a keen eye for beauty. He ordered one of his guards to invite the girl to talk with him. Told of the presence of the famed Count of Te Van, the girl curtsied before Nguyen Trai and said: "My Lord, I am greatly honored to present my respects."

Nguyen Trai noticed that the girl was unusually beautiful, her voice suave and musical, and her bearing graceful and full of dignity. She also struck him as being poor. On her back she carried some reed mats of the kind used on wooden beds or for spreading on the ground.

Looking at her fine features he saw eyes that twinkled like the morning star and that spoke of intelligence, wit and a bit of naughtiness. Her jet black hair enhanced the loveliness of her ivory complexion. And somehow Nguyen Trai concluded she was not a simple peasant but someone with a good measure of education.

Questions with a Poem

Acknowledging her politeness with a friendly nod and to check the good opinion he had formed of her, he posed questions in the form of a little poem:

*Where do you come from, you who sells reed
mats?*

How many of them do you still have left?

How many springs have you already witnessed?

Do you a husband have and children? How many?

It must be said that in old Vietnam it was a custom among scholars to exchange poems on most occasions. The fact that Nguyen Trai wanted to exchange poems with a girl unknown to him and appearing to come from a modest family showed he held her in good esteem and treated her as an equal. The last line of his poem, however, somehow was rather indelicate and could have offended a chaste lass.

With no time for reflection, the girl answered extemporaneously:

*I live in Tay Ho (the Western lake) and sell reed
mats.*

You need not ask how many I still have left.

*I have seen a number of springs equal to the day
of full moon and odd.*

*I do not a husband have, so how can you of my
child speak.*

The girl meant to say that she was 16 years of age (the full moon day is 15). In answer to Nguyen Trai's last line, she wanted to say: "Don't ask about my husband, my child (the double meaning of this is more apparent in the Vietnamese text).

For a man of about 60 with the rank of a prime minister to be addressed as a child, it would be



Nguyen Trai comes across a young girl, full of grace and dignity.

offending. But Nguyen Trai was disarmed by her quick wit, candor and talent.

On his request she identified herself as Thi Lo and said she lived on the bank of the lake. An orphan, she had been adopted by an old and childless woman. Three years back, the old woman had heard somebody crying and knocking with insistence on her door, but she had ignored the call in the belief that it was a wandering ghost.

In those days, the belief persisted that men or women killed in an accident were bitter about their fate and wanted to avenge themselves on the living. Death through an accident disrupted the cycle of living and their souls could not be reincarnated for a new life until somebody's soul replaced that of a victim in the world of wandering souls. Thus it was necessary to choose one among the living and make him suffer the same fate as theirs for rebirth.

Such a belief, for instance, accounted for one fisherman, a good swimmer, refusing to go to the rescue of a drowning man. The fisherman was convinced that the drowning man had to die in order to liberate the soul of one who had previously drowned in the same river. If he saved the man it would have been him who had to forfeit his life to replace a soul.

The terrified old woman who had gone to bed continued to ignore the pleas for help at the door. The cries, however, continued: "Please let me in, for heaven's sake. In this weather, could anybody have the heart to let even a dog outside?"

Unable to bear the repeated pleading of what appeared to be those of a little girl, the old woman arose from bed, struck a flint and lit a small oil lamp and inquired: "Who is there who ventures into the night in this foul weather?"

Cold and Hungry

The reply was quick: "Pity, grandmother, let me in. I am cold and hungry. In the absence of my father, my stepmother drove me out of the house. I do not know where to go and, wandering in the night, I was caught by this storm."

A strong gust extinguished the oil lamp as the woman opened the door. It was completely dark outside. Lightning flashed and the woman saw a shivering girl about 12 years old, with fine clothes and a bag tucked under her arm.

The woman let her in and relighted her lamp. "I can put you up for the night, but tomorrow you must leave. I do not want trouble with your father

Girl's benefactor stumbles on secret

if he finds you here," she told the pretty girl drenched by the rain. The girl fell to her knees and clung to the woman's skirt, imploring: "Please let me live with you. I do not want to return to my father's house. I do not exist for him. Only my stepmother and her two children do. She is happy to get rid of me."

Opening her bag, the girl showed the woman jewels which she said were given to her on her mother's death-bed. The girl explained that her mother had foreseen her father's remarrying and her having no place in the parental home.

Advising her daughter to carefully keep the jewels for they could be of use to her later, the mother said her heart was breaking as she was about to leave her daughter at such a tender age, but she has to say as a Vietnamese saying goes:

Is there any bone in a rice cake?

Is there any love in a stepmother's heart for her husband's children?

An Unwanted Child

True to her mother's prediction, a year later the husband remarried and the stepmother bore two children. The girl became an unwanted child and despite her best efforts at household work could not satisfy her stepmother. Finally she was driven out of the house.

The old woman was moved to tears by the girl's story. She gave her food and dry clothes to put on and both retired for the night.

Upon waking up the old woman found everything tidy in the house. The girl had put things in order and prepared breakfast while the woman was still asleep.

It was the first time since long that anybody had worked and cared for the woman who had lived alone for decades. Choked with emotion, she said the child should have rested after her experience of the previous night.

The girl assured her that being young, she could endure hard toil and that, from that time on, the old woman would no longer have to work. Told that the woman had to go to the market everyday to sell flowers and vegetables, the girl said: "You shall stay at home and I shall work for you. I shall sell some of my jewels to get some capital for a more important trade."

When informed by the girl that her name was Be and her age 12, the woman said: "Be means little. It is not a good name. Since you are changing your way of life, you must change your name, too. You came to me from the road. I shall call you Lo, meaning road. Your name shall be Thi Lo." (In

Vietnam girls' names are preceded by the word Thi to denote feminine gender).

From that time, the old woman and Thi Lo lived happily in the hut by the bank of the Great Lake. Thi Lo found that buying reed mats wholesale and selling them in retail was more profitable than selling flowers and vegetables.

At night Thi Lo read books bought from the capital and her education vastly improved. Her trade prospered and soon she hoped to build a brick-house to replace the woman's thatched hut.

One afternoon, Thi Lo was basking in the sunshine on the backyard of the house. There was a pleasant warmth in her body and she soon fell asleep. Then twilight began to descend.

The Truth Exposed

It was time for dinner. The woman went out and looked for Thi Lo who was wont to resting on a platform in the backyard where a breathtaking view of the Great Lake and the horizon could be had. Suddenly the woman uttered a blood-curdling scream. On the platform she saw a long white serpent curled among Thi Lo's clothes. Startled, the serpent raised its head and turned glowing red eyes in her direction. The woman fainted.

When she came to, Thi Lo was at her side, putting her to bed and assuring her that she had a hallucination. But the woman, long inclined to believing in ghosts and demons, was convinced that the serpent was Thi Lo's real self. She never recovered from the shock of seeing the white serpent.

Thi Lo, aware that her secret was given away by carelessness, did nothing to save the woman and let her die to protect that secret from being disclosed. After the woman died, Thi Lo hired a maid of about her age to do the household while she continued selling reed mats. A few months later, she met Nguyen Trai.

Wedding of Nguyen Trai

Enamored by her youth, beauty, intelligence and wit, Nguyen Trai sent emissaries a month after their meeting to propose that Thi Lo be his third wife. His two other wives had grownup children and lived in their estates in distant provinces.

Thi Lo accepted. A palanquin escorted by male and female servants as well as soldiers went to her house by the bank of the lake and brought her to Nguyen Trai's palace. There began a happy life for them. In Thi Lo, Nguyen Trai not only had a young and beautiful wife, but also a brilliant companion well versed in composing poems as well as in literature and philosophy. All this only served to heighten resentment and jealousy among his colleagues in the royal court.

The king was only a lad of 16 but already he had a reputation for lust and licentiousness. He revered Nguyen Trai for being the top counsellor of his father during the war for independence, and

Trai, family, wife draw death penalty

upon the former's advice, restrained himself from dissipation and search for pleasure.

Thi Lo's fame quickly spread throughout the capital and men around the king suggested that Thi Lo be presented to him. King Le Thai Tong was fascinated by Thi Lo's beauty and intelligence. He thought of her as the most beautiful being on earth. He appointed her Assistant Minister of Rites on the basis of merit and allowed her free access to the imperial palace, a privilege reserved for few mandarins of high rank whose duty was to report to the king on important and urgent matters.

Nguyen Trai's colleagues grew more jealous of him and soon ugly rumors made the rounds of the palace. The queen became suspicious about Thi Lo's presence, particularly in view of the king's high praise of her talents in public.

With characteristic perception, Nguyen Trai realized the peril posed by such a situation to him and his wife. One day, on the pretense that he was too old to serve (he was now past 60), he offered his resignation. When the king refused, the slandering rumors increased. The queen intervened and blamed the king, saying his attitude only justified the gossip among courtiers and her ladies-in-waiting.

Finally, the king accepted the resignation and Nguyen Trai and his wife retired to his estate in Con Son. Years passed. One day, the king who was on his way to witness maneuvers by his troops in Dong Trieu district, Hai Duong province, passed by Con Son to visit Nguyen Trai. Leaving his troops encamped nearby, the king went to Nguyen Trai's estate but found him away visiting friends.

Thi Lo quickly had a banquet held in his honor and to which were invited close attendants of the king. She personally waited on the royal guest, pouring his wine, engaging him in brilliant conversation, exchanging poems and regaling him with wit and humor. The king had missed her since Nguyen Trai's retirement and made no effort to conceal his happiness at being by her side.

The banquet lasted till the wee hours and when the king rose from the table, he was drunk. His attendants helped him to bed. The next morning he was still sick. He could not ride his horse and had to be borne on his gilded palanquin. Thi Lo accompanied him to provide needed care.

On his arrival at Le Chi Vien (Litchi Garden), his estate half way from the capital, the king, feeling much worse, ordered his men to camp for the night, saying they would resume their march the next day if he felt better.

But that night the king died.

When news of his death reached the capital, the queen flew into a rage upon being informed that Thi Lo was by his side when the end came. She was more angered by jealousy than grieved by the loss of her husband. Rumors spread that Thi Lo had poisoned the king on orders of her husband.

Arrested and tortured, Thi Lo was compelled to confess to the charge. She was sentenced to be put in a cage and thrown into the Red River. Legend says that when thrown into the water, Thi Lo assumed the form of a white serpent which slipped through the bars of the cage.

As for Nguyen Trai, the queen accused him of being behind the poisoning of the king which she said Thi Lo had admitted. Nguyen Trai was sentenced to die along with members of his family down to the third generation. His sons, daughters and grandchildren were led to the market place where they were decapitated in public.

A Drop of Blood Recalled

Legend says that upon hearing of the queen's sentence Nguyen Trai's thoughts flashed back to that time long ago when the white serpent let fall a drop of blood on his book and how it came to pass with the queen's order decreeing death for him and his family to the third generation.

All these sad events happened in the year 1442 when the king was 19 and Nguyen Trai 62. Nguyen Trai was fully vindicated 18 years later when King Le Thanh Ton ascended the throne.

The legend of the woman-serpent continues to be told and retold in Vietnamese story books. More than ever it seems to be the concoction of the queen's entourage and Nguyen Trai's jealous enemies to justify the cruel execution of Nguyen Trai, his family, and Thi Lo. ●

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RELIGIONS OF VIETNAM

THE HOA HAO FAITH

By VAN NHAN

Hoa Hao is the name of a village on the right bank of Hau Giang River, in the province of Long Xuyen in the Mekong Delta. Hau Giang or Posterior River is one of the two branches of the Mekong River upon entering South Vietnam, the other being Tien Giang or Anterior River.

In this village was born in 1919 the founder of the Hoa Hao religious sect, Huynh Phu So, known to his followers as the Great Master, the 5th incarnation of our Great Masters, famed for miraculous cures performed among the Vietnamese in olden times.

As a small boy, Huynh Phu So was sickly, prone to a variety of ailments, but suddenly while still an adolescent, his followers say, he became "enlightened" and acquired a profound understanding of everything. Then he began to effect miraculous healing on the sick, particularly mental cases.

Feigned Lunacy

In 1939 Huynh Phu So founded the religious sect known as "Hoa Hao Buddhism." He preached his doctrine all over the country and in an effort not to run afoul of the French police, feigned lunacy.

Unable to escape difficulties with French authorities who forbade him from preaching, he went to Sa Dec and then to Can Tho province. He was finally apprehended by the French and taken to Cho Quan Hospital in Cholon where he was placed in the mental ward. While in the hospital, Huynh Phu So converted to his faith Dr. Tran Van Nam, who became his disciple. He was released after a year of confinement in the hospital and proceeded to Bac Lieu province. In 1942 he went to



Headquarters of Hoa Hao Buddhist faith in Saigon.

Saigon and organized what he called the "Vietnam Buddhist Alliance" in a vain effort to unite Buddhist monks.

After the Japanese coup of March 9, 1945 against French authorities in Vietnam, he founded the "Association for Promoting Vietnam's Independence." At the request of Japanese occupation forces, he went on a mission in the eastern provinces of Cochinchina to dispel the people's worries about the takeover.

During the terrible famine that wrought havoc among the North Vietnam's population, he organized the transport of rice to starving North Vietnamese peasants.

When the Communist Viet Minh seized the power on August 19, 1945, he refused to cooperate with Communist leader Tran Van Giau who sent people to arrest him, but he managed to escape in time.

Later, he returned to Saigon, and founded "The National United

Front," and in cooperation with Nguyen Van Sam, created the Social Democrat Party. Finally, he was compelled to cooperate with the Viet Minh, and became a "Special Delegate."

In the meantime, he succeeded in creating a body of armed partisans, first to fight the French who came back, and then the Communists.

He appears to have been assassinated by the Communist Viet Minh, one day in April, 1947. But this is denied by his followers who number by the millions, the majority of whom live in Can Tho and Long Xuyen provinces. Thanks to their activity no Communist agents dare infiltrate the territory of the latter province that has remained throughout the present war the safest and quietest area in South Vietnam.

Hoa Hao Teachings

The teachings of Hoa Hao Bud-

dharma are a combination of Buddhist, Confucian, and Taoist doctrines. They also emphasize nationalism.

The Hoa Hao believe in the transmigration of the soul after death and rebirth or reincarnation. It sets as a principle that destiny in the present life is conditioned by actions in the past life, according to the law of Karma or the inexorable law of causality (cause and effect).

It advises its followers to avoid:

- Killing, robbing and adultery, the three evils originating from one's body.

- Oppression by word of the mouth (shouting to prevent somebody from saying what he wants), injury by words, vilifying, calumniating. All these evils are created by the tongue.

- Greed, anger and passion, evils from thought.

Hoa Hao stresses Confucian morals. It also gives importance to Taoism. Huynh Phu So practiced Taoism when he performed miraculous cures, when he looked for a tranquil place to meditate and try to acquire supernatural powers.

Hoa Hao is nationalistic. Among the divinities worshipped by the Hoa Hao are national heroes.

The Hoa Hao faithful are enjoined to always remember the "4 blessings":

- Blessings from parents.
- Blessings from the nation.
- Blessings from the Three Jewels (Tiratna—Buddha, Dharma or Dharma) and Sangha.
- Blessings from fellow-citizens and humanity.

They must follow the eight right paths or the eight-fold path of Buddhism (see previous article on Buddhism in Vietnam by author in *Vietnam Magazine*).

They must exert full control of themselves:

- To take right action in this world.
- Not say all that they feel.
- Not anger neighbors.
- Not anger their parents.
- Master their passions.
- Be identical with themselves.



The Hoa Hao avoid pretentious pagodas, preferring simplicity. Above is their headquarters in Bac Lieu while below is the entrance to Bac Lieu compound.



- Maintain virtues.
- Protect their enterprises.

Hoa Hao rites are characterized by simplicity. In their temples as well as at home, there are altars for worshipping Buddha, ancestors and national heroes.

The altars are simple in decor. As offerings, there are only pure water (symbolizing the purity of the soul), flowers (symbolizing the purity of colors), and incense, (symbolizing the perfumes of the universe).

No icons are allowed. The color of the religion is brown. Funerals must be performed in the simplest way.

The Hoa Hao must respect the following 8 commandments:

- Never drink alcohol, never

gamble, never smoke opium, never indulge in illegitimate sexual pleasure.

- Never be lazy.
- Never be extravagant.
- Never swear.
- During days of worship, do not eat meat of buffalo, ox or dog.
- Do not use or burn votive paper objects.
- Always think carefully before taking action.
- Love one another.

Other Religions

Though Buddhism, Christianity, Caodaism, and Hoa Hao are the principal religions practiced in Vietnam, the Vietnamese, whatever his religion, is deeply imbued with Confucianism and Taoism. Confucianism actually is morals or ethics more than religion, and Taoism is a religion worshipping a great variety of deities who are believed to command all forces of nature or who were heroes become gods after death.

As for the cult of ancestors, it is practiced by almost all Vietnamese, regardless of religion.

Islam

Islam is also practiced in Vietnam, mostly by the ethnic minority originating from the Chams, descendants of the former Champa Kingdom, which occupied a few centuries ago the region that today is Central Vietnam. The Chams now estimated at about 41,000 people, live in the provinces of Ninh Thuan (Phan Rang), Binh Thuan (Phan Thiet), Chau Doc, Vinh Binh, Binh Tuy, Phu Yen (Tuy Hoa), and Binh Long, and Saigon.

Some Indians living in Vietnam are also Muslims. They have their mosques in Saigon, Cholon, and other province capitals.

Baha'i

A new religion recently introduced in Vietnam is the Baha'i faith. Baha'i, a religion created by The Bab, is a type of reformed Islam.

The Bab (in Persian, The Gate)

was the name taken by a Moslem born in Persia or present-day Iran, at Shiraz, in 1819. His real name was Mirza Mohammed Ali. Destined by his parents to be a tradesman, his inclination was actually for religious meditations. He made pilgrimages to Mecca and many other shrines.

In 1844, he took the name of Bab, i.e. the Gate through which all men must pass in order to learn the spiritual truths, of which he was, by the grace of God or Allah, the repository. The next year he began to preach. A little later, his fame spread throughout the whole of Persia. Alarmed, the government and the official clergy, by the end of 1845, took severe measures to stop his preaching.

Bab's Execution

After a revolt at Yezd and in Mazanderan (northern region of Persia along the coasts of the Caspian Sea) posed great danger to the government, the new shah, 17-year-old Nassir-ed-Din, on his Prime Minister's advice, resorted to terrorism. The Bab was seized, and after a mock trial, sentenced to death and executed on July 9, 1850, at Tabriz in northwest Persia.

Before his death, the Bab designated as his successor a young man of 20, Mirza Yahya, also known as Subh-i Azal (dawn of eternity). The Bab's followers, the Babis, were dispersed and moved their headquarters to Bagdad, at that time under Turk rule. There they stayed for 10 years.

Then at the Persian government's request, the Turkish government designated the town of Edirne or Adrianople as their place of residence. It was at that time (1866) that Mirza Hussein Ali, Subh-i Azal's elder brother, took the name of Baha Ullah (Allah's Splendor). He proclaimed himself the latest incarnation of God, and the only repository of the spiritual truths taught by the Bab. This produced a secession: the Bahatism created was opposed to the original Babism. In order to put an end to the conflict, the Turkish government deported Subh-i Azal and his adherents, the



A lecture meeting of Baha'i sect which is gaining adherents in Vietnam.

Babis or Azalis, to the Island of Cyprus.

The Persian government sought the extradition or at least the trial of Baha Ullah, which the Turkish government refused. Baha Ullah went on preaching, and the Bahais became more and more numerous.

After his death, one of his sons, Abbas Effendi, continued his father's work, and Bahatism, or the Baha'i doctrine, is gaining many adherents throughout the World, including the United States, where it has set up a center in Chicago.

Baha'i, created in 1866 was introduced in Vietnam in 1954. Since then it has gained thousands of adherents and is spreading.

It now claims a following of tens of millions throughout the world and its international headquarters is on Mount Carmel, at Haifa, Israel.

Baha'i Teachings

The founder of this religion, Baha Ullah, was born in 1817 at Teheran from a rich and influential family. Already in 1844, he was among the first disciples of the Bab. He devoted his life to the preaching of the Bab's doctrine at first in Persia. After the Bab's death, he and the Bab's followers were exiled to Bagdad, then to Constantinople, to Adrianople or Edirne. It was in that town, that

in 1866 he publicly declared his mission, laying the foundations of Bahatism.

He claimed to be the one, through whom God expressed his will, the one whom the Bab had announced in his writings. The Bab's followers at first separated from him, but finally recognized him, and became Bahais, after he had written letters to the principal European Chiefs of State, inviting them to join him in setting up a religion for the universal peace. Exiled by the Sultan (Turkey) in 1868 to Acre (in French: Saint Jean d'Acre), he wrote most of his works and died there on May 29, 1892 at the age of 75.

With him, Bahatism has become a universal religion, synthesizing and completing all existing beliefs, ancient and present.

The essentials of his teachings are aimed at:

1. Unifying humanity.
2. Understanding truth in an impartial way.
3. Worshipping only one God: all Gods of different religion are one.
4. Achieving the aspirations of all religions: unification and harmony.
5. Bringing into harmony religion, science and logic.
6. Abolishing prejudices and superstitions.

Courage, honor may inspire cult

7. Equality between men and women.

8. Compulsory general education.

9. Adopting a universal language.

10. An equitable solution to economic problems.

11. The creation of an international Supreme Court.

12. The attainment of world peace.

*

Besides all these religions in South Vietnam, creeds have been preached by individuals who have rallied people to ideas inspired by the aforementioned religions.

"Coconut Monk"

One example is a sect headed by the "Coconut Monk," who resides in Kien Hoa, on an island in the middle of Tien Giang River.

A few years ago, a young boy was given great publicity by many Vietnamese newspapers as a prophet, drawing many admirers from wealthy and educated people in Saigon which he visited for a few days. He was respectfully addressed as "Dao Nho," or "Little Monk."

But his success was transitory. At a dinner given by Catholics in honor of a very high foreign Catholic dignitary leaving the country for another assignment, I was astonished to see a well-educated Vietnamese catholic, who had occupied a very high public office ask the Catholic dignitary very strange questions about "miracles" by the "Little Monk" he affirmed to have witnessed. As I expected, the Catholic dignitary gave him no answers, "the miracles" he spoke of being so fantastic, unbelievable, and absurd that perhaps he was the only man in the whole gathering who gave them credence.

This happening convinces me that many among my countrymen are prone to readily accept reports

of wonders, miracles and the like. As such it is easy to preach new religions in this country where the influence of ancient Chinese culture still runs deep.

A typical example of Vietnamese concern for spiritual influence is provided by a recent event. In a province of the Mekong Delta, an old man boldly accused the Chief of Province of corruption and malpractice. Subsequently he was assassinated by four armed men. Later one of them confessed, saying he was tortured mentally

The public, press and some legislators raised an outcry against the acquittal by the military. They asked for revision of the sentence which they called unjust. But since any verdict by a military court is final and not subject to appeal unless the High Court intervenes, the case is still pending.

In the meantime the population of the locality where the old man lived built a temple to worship him with a view to appeasing his soul and to honor his courage



"Coconut Monk" lives on an island in middle of Tien Giang River.

by his victim's soul. The Chief of Province, he admitted, sent him and three others to assassinate the old man whom he accused of many misdeeds.

The Chief of Province was arrested by the civil authorities, but later the military claimed jurisdiction over the case because the Chief of Province was an army officer. In a sensational trial, during which the public prosecutor praised the defendant, the latter was acquitted.

and dedication to the interest of his country.

Thus, with public approval a man is made a divinity after death. This conforms to the Vietnamese tradition.

Hoa Hao Buddhism and Other Religions

For the Vietnamese, worshipping the dead is as important as religion.

Up to 1954, most of the temples

for national heroes were located in North Vietnam (Vietnam extended south only a few hundreds years ago), either in Hanoi, in the place of birth or sites they had chosen themselves in their lifetime.

In South Vietnam, the most important temple for national heroes is the Temple of Marshal Le Van Duyet, in Gia Dinh town, separated from Saigon only by a bridge spanning the Rach (canal) Thi Nghe, a tributary of the Saigon River.

Hero Worship

Le Van Duyet was one of the most outstanding generals of Emperor Gia Long, founder of the Nguyen Dynasty, who ascended the throne in 1802 after fighting a civil war lasting more than 20 years.

A few years ago, before the curfew was decreed, Vietnamese as well as Chinese living in Gia Dinh and Saigon would crowd at



Muslim structure in Vinh Binh.

midnight of the last day of the lunar year the spacious yards of the temple, elbow their way to the altar and then proceed to the tomb of the Marshal to burn incense and pay homage. For hours, firecrackers would be set off to welcome the coming year and drive away evil spirits or devils.

Because of the curfew, the temple is only opened early on the first day of the new year and firecrackers is banned. Nevertheless on the Tet (Lunar New Year festival) people flock to the temple to pay homage to the Marshal.

Last September 15, the anniversary of the Marshal's birthday was celebrated. Prime Minister Tran Thien Khiem and many ranking government official were guests of honor at this religious ceremony that ended with a Vietnamese opera performance.

Opera performances, sometimes staged for many days, are part of the ceremony honoring the Genie worshipped in a temple. ●

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THEIR HEARTS ARE WELL

By NGUYEN DUY LIEU

Recently five Vietnamese children, the youngest aged 3 and the eldest 11, returned to Saigon from Minnesota, U.S.A. All had big, happy smiles as they stepped down from a Pan-American airliner. All had one thing in common: they had been successfully operated on for heart defects.

Straight into the arms of parents or relatives crying with joy they flew. They had much to tell, these children. Stories of love and care, volunteer doctors, free services and the never-to-be-forgotten experience of open heart surgery.

PACT Sponsorship

The operations were carried out under the sponsorship of Partners Aiding Children Today (PACT) in conjunction with the Metropolitan Medical Center's Children's Heart Fund.

Accompanying the children on their return home was Mrs. Merna Bakman, Secretary of PACT and Coordinator of the Children's Heart Fund. The children are Nguyen Anh Ngoc Diep, 3, of Saigon; Nguyen Thi Phuc Hanh, 7, Saigon; Dang Thi Chieu Hoang, 7, Da Nang; Nguyen Quang Trinh, 9, Da Nang; and Nguyen Minh Nga, 11, Vung Tau.

Mrs. Bakman said Huynh Xi, 12, of Da Nang, who underwent surgery on Sept. 10 is progressing well and should return to Vietnam very soon with a Vietnamese nurse, Miss Thien, of Saigon.

Each year since 1972, PACT has made it possible for an average of 20 Vietnamese children to receive benefits provided by the Metropolitan Medical Center's Children's Heart Fund. This Minneapolis-based program, the only one of its kind in the world, provides life-saving open heart surgery to Vietnamese children.

PACT's Saigon staff makes the required arrangements with the RVN Ministry of Health to select and prepare the patients for their journey to Minnesota. They counsel the parents and maintain liaison with them during and after the child's surgery. A Vietnamese nurse escort is selected by the Ministry of Health for each group of children, and free passage from Vietnam to Minnesota and back is provided by Pan-American and Western Airlines. The surgeons donate their services and the drugs are supplied by several U.S. drug companies. Other expenses have been discounted and are paid by the Hospital Auxiliary and PACT volunteers.

Pan-Am's current financial problems have unfortunately forced it to discontinue offering free air

fare to Vietnamese heart patients. The parents of children awaiting heart surgery hope that the crisis will soon be resolved so that PACT can resume sending children to Minneapolis' Metropolitan Medical Center.

Two cases of open heart surgery were recently conducted successfully by Vietnamese doctors at the Nguyen Van Hoc Hospital, Gia Dinh, under direction of Dr. Nguyen Duy Cung, the hospital head.

Loma Linda Team

Last May a 13-member heart team from the Loma Linda University School of Medicine, California, USA, performed 60 free surgeries at the Saigon Adventist Hospital, the first ever in the Republic of Vietnam. ●



Five Vietnamese children (center) are back home after heart surgery.

ARCHITECT NGO VIET THU

A SENSE OF NOBILITY

By DINH HOANG NGAN



Modern architecture should combine Eastern spiritualism, natural law of equilibrium, and harmony with nature with the Western concept of *nombre d'or* beauty and technique, and rapport between volume and proportion, architect Ngo Viet Thu maintains.

Despite the war and scarce resources, he says, the Vietnamese try to meet the demands of a developing nation thanks to creative spirit and resourcefulness by using local cheap materials and natural ventilation, and by cutting down running cost in all our major construction projects.

Service Through Art

In the construction of public buildings and schools initiated and supported by the Government of President Nguyen Van Thieu, "our purpose is to serve man through the cultural influence of architecture—a major art which encompasses Western painting and sculpture and Eastern sciences of astronomy and geomancy in their relations between man and nature," says the famous Vietnamese architect. "We believe we can, through architecture, promote a sense of nobility, a subconscious of synthesis and a spirit of cohesion, an *esprit d'ensemble* which would preserve individualism in a disciplined *esprit de corps* among young people, especially students."

"Such a difficult task is possible through plan arrangement, internal disposition according to Eastern philosophy, our traditional sense of balance and harmony between man and nature and the Western concept of classical, permanent beauty and its technique of volume and proportion."

Thu says that while the West seems to use science and technology to dominate nature and to move away from it, we in the East intend to live in harmony with Creation and to blend ourselves with the environment. "We think architecture should *faire corps* with nature through analysis of human needs and formulate a synthesis to achieve harmony between man and his environment."

For the weather, the sun, the seasons, the changing climate, the geographical position of a country or a place, even the land configuration, the terrain, waters, soil, etc. all play a part and fulfill a role in architecture. Furthermore, it varies with the purposes of construction, the use to which architecture

would be destined, official, financial, legislative, administrative, financial, monumental, religious or otherwise.

Internal arrangement, he says, should express the *character* or the exact function of an architecture like the radiating personality of a man or the *beauté rayonnante* of a woman. Through internal arrangement, the planning purpose of an architecture could be seen by its facade and outward appearance, but its true function, its practical purpose could be appreciated only from the inside. For the appreciation of such a complex, *major art* like architecture requires basic cultural knowledge which would encompass a balanced philosophy of human life and a broad concept of the universe.

Difference in Spirit

In the opinion of Thu, although modern architecture in both East and West use the same construction materials and similar techniques, there is a difference in



National Agronomic Institute designed by architect Thu nears completion.



Lobby of Air Vietnam building—elegance with limited expenditures.

spirit between them. The Vietnamese concept of architecture is based on Oriental philosophy, he points out.

Take for instance the Independence Palace in Saigon. It was built on the *righteous and virtuous* concept with the main facade patterned after the character *Vuong* (King) topped by a dot—the flag pole—thus changing the meaning of the word into *chua* (sovereign) or *chu* (master, ruler)

In a broader sense, this also means democracy or government of the people. The Orientals conceive democracy as having three fundamental things: *nhân* (humanism), *minh* (wisdom) and *dung* (courage). The whole facade of the Palace is patterned after the character *Hung* (thriving)—a wish that the country would flourish and thrive forever. The three fundamental things mentioned above bear close relations with the principles of *tam cuong* (the three bonds) which govern the relations between prince and minister, father and son, husband and wife and of *ngu thuong* (five constant virtues): *nhân* (humanism), *ngĩa* (morality), *lê* (courtesy), *tri* (intelligence) and *tin* (faith).

The whole idea behind the construction of Independence Palace or the philosophy of its architec-

ture can be summed up in the concept of *Vuong Dao* (The Way of the King), a time-honored philosophic and political concept of the Orient.

Financial Box

Typical of financial architecture is the stately building of Air Vietnam on Phan Dinh Phung Street, Saigon. This “financial box” conveys both a sense of strength and stability, elegance and lightness. Above all, it’s some kind of an invitation to a voyage, a lure for travel to attract tourism.

The simple yet elegant design of the Air Vietnam building is an application of the law of equilibrium, a combination and alternation of full and void, of warmth and coolness. The Western technique of volume and proportion is respected, but the Ying-Yang spirit behind Oriental philosophy is notorious. Vietnamese architecture presents a contrast to Western architecture of abundant resources and materials and large capital outlays with stringent economy, use of local resources, low cost labor, and a spiritual concept to suit its purpose of maintaining a balance in construction and preserving Oriental aesthetic values.

Architecture generates cultural influence.

A fast 20-minute drive to the future University campus of Saigon on U.S.-built Saigon-Bien Hoa highway leads to the vast construction site of the National Agronomic Institute. This sprawling school complex was started in January 1972 and is scheduled to be completed by the end of this year. Located on an 8,500-square meter lot and surrounded by an immense campus, the Institute is designed to accommodate 1,200 students. Originally estimated at 5 million dollars by foreign experts, architect Thu spent only 270 millions piasters—the equivalent of US\$420,000.

In the agricultural school project, Ngo Viet Thu intends to use architecture to inculcate a sense of nobility, of cohesiveness and a spirit of discipline tempered by the fostering of personality development through individual freedom.

“I intend to change the current *mutation* (mercantile) trend of some people and replace it with a spirit of creation, of composition, of nobility, and I hope that the majestic architecture with its natural setting would bear upon the subconsciousness of the students.”

The architect hopes that when Vietnam becomes a truly peaceful and developed country, he shall be able to apply the results and new findings of architects in advanced countries by using more bountiful local resources as construction materials.

The 46-year old architect, a native of Hue, has been awarded the First Grand Prix de Rome, and is an honorary fellow of the American Institute of Architecture.

Ngo Viet Thu lives in a modest but elegant villa with seven children in a quiet residential quarter of Saigon. His two drawing rooms—one with elaborately carved wooden chairs and tables of traditional style, and the other, with comfortable sofas and large seats, an old monocord and a 61-string guitar hanging on a column and his own paintings decorating the walls—all reflect the warm hospitality as well as the fineness of his Oriental and cosmopolitan spirit.

AN INTERVIEW WITH BUTTINGER

LEADING HISTORIAN ON V. N.

By **TRAN MY**

That reserved, smallish man we saw seated in a hotel lobby in downtown Saigon turned out to be the Western world's leading historian on Vietnam: Joseph Buttinger.

This native Austrian's mild, plainly-dressed appearance would make it difficult to guess his stormy background in fascist Europe and the maze of events that made him a political refugee in the United States and led to his deep interest in Vietnam.

His pink, round head was tilted over a French edition of André Malraux's *Anti-Mémoires*. He was short and fairly bald except for waves of white and slate-grey hair in the back. He look like a somber, elderly cherub. Clearly no intention of biting anyone.

Men with busy, American accents stopped and talked to him and called him Joe. He looked up and replied slowly. He seemed very reluctant to leave his book. Important meetings with important people were being arranged or discussed. It had to do with his visit here as a member of the IRC (International Rescue Committee).

We arranged for an interview.

"Pick me up at two o'clock," he said.

He had a vaguely tired Middle European accent. His blue eyes, hazel at the center, were friendly.

3-Volume Opus

Joseph Buttinger's monumental three-volume opus is acknowledged as the most ambitious study of Vietnam by any Western historian. Volume I, *The Smaller Dragon*, begins in 300 B.C. Praeger published it in 1958. Volumes II and III were published as one book, *Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled*. The latter covers the era of French colonialism, the war, the Vietminh

guerillas, and concludes with the fall of President Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963. (A critical chapter on the later U.S. involvement was added to a subsequent edition).

Herr Buttinger, or "Joe," was punctual at two o'clock. He was also working on his diary. He did much work on his diary, chronicling the events around him.

Despite his international reputation as a historian, Buttinger is not a professor. In fact he's a dropout. He never went to Oxford, Heidelberg, the Sorbonne, the Ivy League or any university. He never attended a secondary school either. He is as self-educated as Abraham Lincoln was. Maybe more so. His occupation?

Freelance Writer

"I am a freelance writer," he said.

At one time he was a poor farm-boy, a glassblower and later an underground activist in fascist Austria.

We walked to the garden in the Continental Hotel. Nothing about Buttinger was hurried, including his slight shuffle.

He first arrived in South Vietnam in 1954 to set up the IRC's first office for relief operations in Saigon. Then, as now, the IRC worked mainly with political refugees and prisoners, under the premise that only government has the resources to care for the mass of other refugees.

"I was chiefly concerned with students and faculty who came here from Hanoi University in 1954."

He said that the old French Theater (today the National Assembly building) was turned into a camp for orphans. The IRC also

operated clinics and day centers here.

The course of events leading Buttinger to Vietnam began in Europe. He was born near the Mozartian town of Salzburg in Austria. He was a young man in 1934 when fascist Chancellor Dollfuss took power in Austria. Buttinger became chairman of the illegal Social Democratic movement and went underground.

"I lived three years underground with a false Czechoslovakian passport."

His underground days in Vienna ended abruptly when the Nazis arrived. Hitler annexed Austria on March 11, 1938.

"I went to Paris the same day."

Nazi annexation, he said, "made our work impossible." In Paris he did two crucial things: learned the French language and married. Both were to play key roles in the writing of his Vietnam historical works. He first met his future wife, a wealthy Chicagoan, in Vienna. She was studying medicine and psychoanalysis there. They couldn't marry in Vienna "because of my false papers."

Refugee from Nazism

Buttinger, as a refugee from Nazism, arrived in New York City on November 15, 1939. In 1940 he joined the IRC, which makes him "one of the oldest members." The Committee, he said, later "persuaded President Roosevelt to issue emergency visas to several thousand refugees in France."

Buttinger lectured at Yale, Cornell and other universities. Using his underground name, Gustav Richter, he wrote an autobiographical book about the collapse of democracy and socialism in Central Europe, *The Twilight of*

Socialism, published by Praeger in 1953.

In the Continental garden Buttinger drank plain soda water with ice. He didn't smoke.

Today a paperback edition condenses his massive 3-volume Vietnam work into a single volume. *Vietnam: A Political History*. This special edition is in its fourth printing. Of the original three volumes, he said, *The Smaller Dragon* still sells because it deals with a period about which little has been written." Among Vietnamese intellectuals and foreign officials here, "almost everyone has read *The Smaller Dragon*, but few have read the last two volumes." Many other writers have covered the period of the last two volumes.

Did the title, *The Smaller Dragon*, suggest that Vietnam is an off-shoot of China?

"Culturally, yes, but not politically."

Racially Distinct

He considers the Vietnamese racially distinct from the Chinese. Over 2,000 years ago, he said, four tribes of "Viets" lived south of the Yangtze River. China's first great dynasty, the Ch'in Dynasty, drove them south. One of these tribes entered what is today the Red River Valley in North Vietnam. It intermarried with an indigenous "Indonesian" people already living there. These "Indonesian" people had already mixed with a "Negroid" people related to Papuans who had migrated there centuries before. The new empire was known as "Nam Viet." It stretched from today's Canton area in China down to the Red River Valley. In 111 B.C. China destroyed it. Chinese colonialism lasted a thousand years, or approximately ten times the length of the later French colonialism.

Buttinger got his first glimpse of Indochina in 1954. It impressed him deeply.

"I was completely captivated by Vietnamese charm, intelligence and resourcefulness."

Immediately he wanted to fill "the immense gap" in his knowledge of the country.

"At that time I didn't even know the difference between Bao Dai and Cao Dai," he chuckled.

He looked for historical works in English. He found that almost nothing existed.

"In January 1955, I decided to write the book I would have liked to read when arriving here."

Result: *The Smaller Dragon*.

Buttinger, in those days, had many dinner dates and other meetings with the late President Ngo Dinh Diem. The European writer broached a theory to the remote, Catholic President. According to this theory, Vietnam had an opportunity to break the evolutionary pattern under which Colonialism had led to Communism in Asia.

"I kept urging President Diem to make radical land reforms and to allow more political freedom.

Diem was overthrown and killed in 1963. Would Vietnam's subsequent history have been different had Diem continued to rule?

"No," Buttinger said.

Diem, in his opinion, could not have prevented the tragic escalation of the war.

Buttinger's 3-volume history of Vietnam is a work of old-world thoroughness. It took nine years to write. He accumulated his own library for the task. Beginning in 1955 he contacted Vietnamese refugees living in Paris, book dealers in Hong Kong, Japan etc., and bought everything available on the subject (mostly works in French).

60,000 Volumes

By 1965 his New York home contained a library of 6,000 volumes on Vietnamese subjects. His library totalled 60,000 volumes on all subjects. (He will donate his Vietnam library to New York University. The other volumes will go to a new university in his native Austria).

The 1,300 pages of his 3-volume history of Vietnam include 2,000 footnotes. He explains why.

"When I found opinions conflicting with mine, I quoted the conflicting opinions in the foot-

notes. This has improved my reputation among scholars."

Buttinger explained how a one-time farmboy and drop-out from school became a unique scholar.

"At the end of World War I, food was scarce in Austria. At the age of 13 I had to leave school and go to work."

At age 15 he became a glass-blower. In the glass factory there was also a library. He used it.

"In the Social Democratic Party there was strong pressure on young people to educate themselves."

Young Buttinger read "hundreds and hundreds of books on every conceivable subject."

Education Formula

At age 24 he became Provincial Secretary for the Social Democratic Party. During the previous four years he directed a children's home. The educational work there contributed to his own education. His formula for self-education: the systematic study of relevant books.

In Vietnam Buttinger has found his subject.

"Since 1955 I have written only on Vietnam."

He's also done an article on Vietnam history for the prestigious *Encyclopedia Britannica*. In October, 1972, he published a 150-page "short history" of Vietnam for students, *A Dragon Defiant*.

He ranks one other Vietnam scholar with himself: Le Thanh Khoi, who is living in Paris.

"Le Thanh Khoi has meant much to me. His *Vietnam, Histoire et Civilisation*, is the classical work by a Vietnamese. It's the only one as ambitious as mine. He was a Viet Minh sympathizer and is loosely called a Marxist. The last chapters are rather slanted, but the rest is the best that exists."

How about the prolific French work?

"The French have produced scholarly and largely speculative essays on Indochina. The rest is political justification of the colonial regime. They did no good historical work until recently.

French journalists did condemnations of the colonial regime."

However, the French opus *Vietnam: Sociologie d'Une Guerre*, by Paul Muse, "influenced me greatly." It was "profound, but not history."

The Frenchman, Bernard Fall, was "an important journalist."

Burckhardt Praised

Buttinger cites 19th century Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt as of great influence because of his "profound sense of history... a very original thinker."

How about the controversial German historian Oswald Spengler who startled Europe a half century ago with his forecast of the decline of the West and the rise of the East?

"Spengler has no relevancy today. He is completely ignored in Europe."

Did the American lack of Vietnam scholars affect the U.S. role in Vietnam?

"In the last five years many U.S. scholars have written profoundly on Vietnam."

US Historians

In recent years he has been able to add 300 new Vietnam titles to his library, though "few are investigations of the past." But American study of history may "very soon assume the same character that great European historians represent."

How about the best-sellers by American journalists David Halberstam and Frances Fitzgerald?

"Valuable contributions, in entirely different ways. Halberstam's *The Best and the Brightest* contributes to an understanding of how U.S. policy here came about. Frances Fitzgerald did much of the work for *A Fire in the Lake* in my library. It's very valuable, though I don't agree with all her conclusions. But she has touched on aspects like Vietnamese nationalism that were not discussed this way before, the 'soul,' the historical roots."

The Fitzgerald book also gave "the best explanation of why a Western phenomenon, Commu-

NATURAL RESOURCES PROVIDE THE KEY

By JOSEPH R. DONAHUE

In many nations of the world, the problem of economics, that is, business and development, is sociological. This holds true for the Republic of Vietnam.

It takes more than money, suitable laws, incentive and encouragement to produce an entrepreneur. Merely investing money in South Vietnam will not make the economy grow. There must be managerial and technical ability.

Attempting to turn an agricultural country into an industrialized one is not the answer. South Vietnam is an agricultural area. Nature created it this way. That which exists must be encouraged and modernized.

What is economically best is also best from the social point of view. Vietnamese hamlets and villages, the religious practices, ancestor worship and all the customs will remain and yet agriculture will flourish so that exports of rice, tapioca, rubber, cinnamon and other spices will earn money.

The population explosion has

nism, was so extraordinarily successful in Vietnam." The book suggests that too many American officials were congenitally or professionally not inclined to understand Vietnam. Buttinger agrees with the book's criticism.

He did not criticize press coverage of the war.

"I found the press coverage excellent. Since 1960 it's been of high quality. Some American officials here disagree violently with this outlook."

He named a very high-ranking official in the U.S. Embassy who, speaking to him recently, "condemned the Saigon press corps *en bloc*."

shown that food has become a wealth-making commodity. Canadian and American wheat farmers are exceedingly wealthy and the grain-growing areas are not attempting to attract General Motors, Ford or other industrial giants.

Because of its narrowness and its long coast line, the Republic of Vietnam can be developed as one of the greatest fishery exporters of the world. Lobster, shrimp, and crab can be processed for canning and freezing. Trash fish, not desired for human consumption, and the processing waste of the shell fish being exported, can be processed to make cat food and be canned. General Foods and other U.S. food companies make considerable money on this extraordinary canned food. The bulk product mixed with the fish would be rice.

To the northeast of Saigon is a vast bamboo area. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has experimented with nearly two hundred species of this plant.

Charles Herty, who established

On Vietnam re-unification:

"That will depend largely on the evolution of U.S. relations with the Communist world. Steps can be taken very soon, but re-unification itself is still in the distant future."

Did he have a guiding principle or philosophy of history?

He mentioned the quotation from Goethe on the book jacket of *The Smaller Dragon*:

"The true historian is a man deeply concerned with the present."

Without knowledge of the past, he said, one was bound to misjudge the present.

the foundation bearing his name, developed wood pulp from pine. The Herty foundation has discovered that bamboo pulp is even better for paper manufacturing than pine pulp. The bamboo yield is six times more per acre than pine. Therefore, why not develop a paper mill outside of Saigon, utilizing bamboo pulp?

For centuries bamboo has been used for poles, bridges, mats, hats, etc. However combining it with modern techniques is something else. Bamboo can be used in reinforcing cement. This was proved at Clemson College in South Carolina, U.S.A., where the press box is made of concrete reinforced by bamboo.

Certain vegetables could be canned and exported, particularly mushrooms which have an expensive U.S. retail value. Coconut and the resulting copra used in soap manufacture could be a valuable export.

While there are limitations to mining, it still does exist. Silicon sand is plentiful along the coast. The invitation to a foreign investor to build a glass factory would help the unemployment problem. There is some zinc mining south of Hue.

Skilled Personnel

The United States has tried to assist the Vietnamese people. Through its programs it created a labor pool of skilled and semi-skilled personnel as well as a group of executive and managerial types. It is my belief that these groups will be important in the future of Vietnam.

The Republic of Vietnam will grow economically if it stands by the natural resources it has. However, if it decides on prestige industries such as the manufacture of aircraft, etc., it will not.

The idea is to make money from one's own natural resources, induce the outsider who wants to use them to build his factory within the country, ease local unemployment, and buy the manufactured products desired. ●



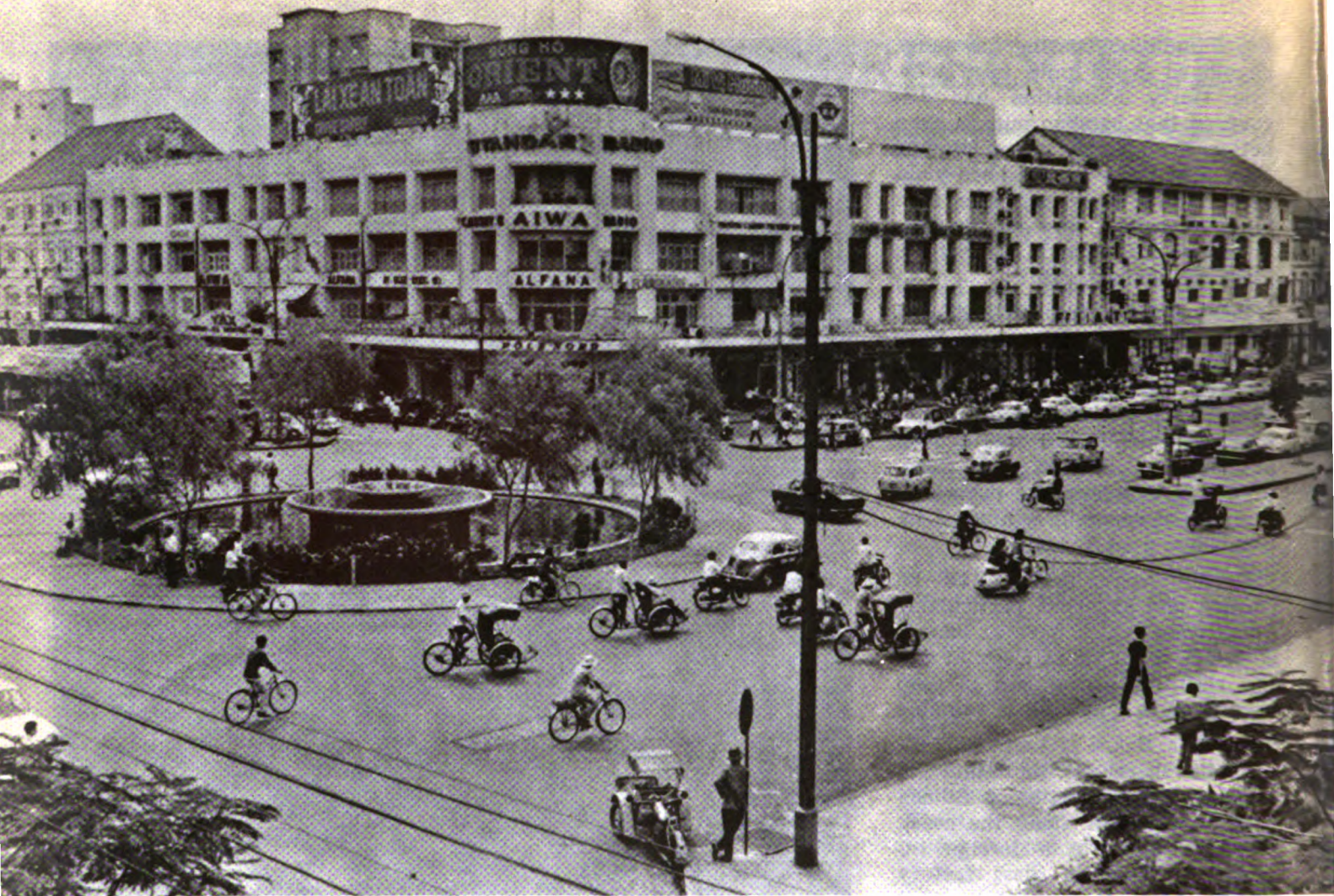
Vietnam abounds with bamboo. Why not bamboo pulp for paper mills?



The products of coconut tree hold great promise in the export field.



High-grade shrimps are very much in demand as an export of Vietnam.



Fountain on rotunda at intersection of Le Loi and Nguyen Hue streets mark center of downtown Saigon.

TEEMING SAIGON

A CITY WITH A SOUL

By TOM HART

What happens to a city of three million people ravaged by more than a quarter century of modern warfare? Does the city become a hardened, soul-less place of indifference? Or can it survive with life continuing in much the manner it does in other parts of the world? For Saigon, capital of South Vietnam, the latter is true. In this bustling metropolis East meets West amidst one of histories of most bitter struggles, and Saigon inhabitants carry on the good, bad,

and indifferent aspects of humanity. The city reflects a blend of East-West heritage in its religion, its food, its architecture, and its people.

A Will to Live

Saigon is a city with an unquenchable will to live. While the political struggle for Saigon continues its deliberations, and despite the hot ground war, Saigon moves forward with the grace and pride

of an oriental princess, the sadness and humiliation of war, and the hope and promise that tomorrow will be better. In short, Saigon is a city with soul.

Oriental Riviera

Travellers arrive daily at Saigon International, an austere white building. Sleek jetliners from Japan, Europe and the United States compete for parking space on the crowded parking ramp. The

airport shares the runway with Tan Son Nhut Air Base, once the sprawling headquarters for American operations in Vietnam. Although Saigon may never replace the jet set's Riviera, there are an increasing number of tourists discovering the sights and sounds outside the gates of Tan Son Nhut.

Carnival Atmosphere

The first impression once you leave Tan Son Nhut Air Base is a feeling of carnival atmosphere. The street is filled with pedi-cabs, motorcycles, gaily painted cyclos, and an array of French motor cars left over from a previous war, all with drivers competing with carnival-barker shouts for your fare. Obtaining transportation is done in the finest tradition of bargaining, the driver lamenting his inability to sell rides for less than cost, the customers threatening to take their business elsewhere. Perhaps you'll try a cyclo—the ride is an experience in itself. Suspended in something akin to an oversized basket on the front of the one-cylinder vehicle, you notice the utter lack of fear on the driver's part as he whizzes you through traffic. The ride will cost from one hundred to three hundred piasters (twenty-five to



The Cathedral of Saigon.

seventy-five cents) depending on your ability to bargain. The streets swirl with a clamor of humanity unequalled outside the Far East.

Although the town appears to be crowding the entrance to the base, there is a ride of about five miles to the center of activity. The ride will take you over a bridge which crosses the malodorous black water of the Ben Nghe Canal. On one side of the bridge

stands a guard, his rifle pointed skyward, guarding against Viet Cong saboteurs who might float explosive charges down the black waters to disrupt transportation. The banks of the narrow, listless canal are crowded with shanties on stilts—a place of refuge for the poorest of the poor. Directly behind the shanties, modern apartments create a startling contrast. The spindle-legged shanty owners take advantage of a city law which decrees that property over water is not taxable. But the residents crowding the black water's edge also run a high risk of cholera.

The cyclo sputters to a stop in the middle of town, and you crawl from the basket suspended in front of the driver. The driver argues that he, "doesn't have change for your five-hundred piaster note." Finally he gives in, makes change for the note from a large wad of bills in his pocket, and you begin strolling east on Tu Do, "Freedom Street."

Formerly bar row for the G.I. populace, a progressive mayor anticipating growing tourist trade with the cease-fire has cleaned up Tu Do and moved bar row across the Saigon River to the city's outskirts. The sights and sounds of humanity swirl around you in bright afternoon sunlight along Tu Do. Street vendors move from their open stalls and, shouting above the sputtering, popping sound of motorcycles and cyclos, they encourage you to buy their wares.

Saigon's Fifth Avenue

On Tu Do, continuing your stroll, you will notice an abundance of construction activities—tearing down old structures to make way for newer, sterile designs of functional modern buildings. That Saigon has undergone great changes in recent years is apparent. Less apparent but true, Saigon is still one of the most fascinating cities in the Far East. Once called "The Pearl of the Orient," Saigon was built around broad avenues and picturesque vistas which can still be seen and appreciated. Halfway down Tu Do you will arrive at Lam Son Square, the center of downtown Saigon.



A view of Tu Do (Freedom) street, the city's "Fifth Avenue."



Nguyen Hue Boulevard, popularly known as Saigon's "Street of Flowers."

Tu Do, particularly around Lam Son Square, is considered the Fifth Avenue of Saigon. There are many excellent curio, art and souvenir shops with reasonable prices. Original oils, including the frame, sell for as little as four dollars at pop art shops on street corners around the square and along Tu Do. The indoor art shops display the work of professionals, many of whom are graduates of Saigon University and have displayed their work throughout the world. The prices for oils at the indoor shops of accomplished artists are considerably higher than at the street corner shops, ranging from ten to one hundred and fifty dollars. The Tran Ngoan Curio Shop at 153 Tu Do offers delicate artistry in jade, crystal, ivory, silver, wood, bronze and numerous other materials. Prices will range from a few dollars to several hundred dollars depending on the quality of material used and workmanship.

Marine Monument

Standing on Lam Son Square, besides the art and curio shops you can see the Vietnamese Marine monument, a solemn reminder of the war and reminiscent of the famous U.S. monument depicting a flag raising by marines on Iwo Jima. Also in the square are two of Saigon's most popular hotels,

the Caravelle and the Continental Palace where Somerset Maugham sat and sipped aperitifs. The Continental Palace restaurant features French and American cuisine, and the French onion soup baked with cheese is a must. Continuing to walk east, Tu Do eventually leads to the Saigon River and the Majestic Hotel—a clean, reasonably priced hotel with restaurant facilities on the top floor. Specialty of

the house, French dishes with an hors-d'œuvres tray that's a meal in itself. But don't eat all your meals in one place. There are over fifty restaurants, including floating restaurants along the Saigon River, and as many hotels in Saigon suitable for tourism. And they offer everything from southern fried chicken to pizza with French gourmet and Chinese cantonese cooking in between. Eight years ago the city's forty hotels were converted to BOQs and BEQs to support military mobilization. Now they are geared for the tourist trade once cherished by Saigon.

Fragmented Religion

What else is there to see in this fascinating city? Swinging west, and still walking within the heart of Saigon, you move up the broad Avenue of Nguyen Hue, also known as the "Street of Flowers" because of its flower stalls and its magnificent flower display before Tet, the Vietnamese New Year. You soon arrive at Kennedy Square and a lovely red brick basilica. This basilica reflects western influence on the oriental religions of Saigon. The Christian teachings led to inevitable rifts of opinion among the Vietnamese.

The differences of opinion re-



Promenade fronting Saigon City Hall, built during French rule.

garding various religious teachings resulted in a multitude of religious shrines in the city including Christian, Buddhist, Confucius, and ultimately "World" religion shrines. One of the more interesting of the latter is a huge globe of the world which can be approached from any direction. The globe rests on a square pedestal around which are arranged the pictures of religious leaders of the world. The World shrine was built to provide a place for people of all religions to worship. Its earthly globe represents the belief that if man lives properly in this life, his heaven will begin here on earth.

A Soft Glow

But the fragmentation of religion isn't apparent in Cholon, Saigon's Chinese quarter, which is a short taxi ride from downtown. Predominant red colors, ornate dragons, coils of incense suspended from the ceiling, and joss sticks smoldering in urns add to the relaxed but dignified atmosphere of the temples. An elderly woman hides her face and turns to kneel at the altar when she sees someone approach with a camera, reflecting the old belief that the camera can capture her soul. But the Western influence is apparent even in the worshippers who enter the Chinese temple. Near the elderly woman kneeling at the front of the temple, a young Chinese girl dressed in Western garb looks after a small child. The three generations of females, representing yesterday, today, and tomorrow abide together among the trappings of an ancient religion.

But religion, like all facets of a city, is a reflection of the city's people. And people are the image called Saigon. What is that image? It's a bizarre mixture of war and carnival atmosphere, but more importantly it's the soft glow of street lamps along Tu Do on a warm evening, reflecting the will to live in the dark almond eyes set in the tawny skin of three million humans. Saigon, a city with its heritage in the past but influenced by the West looks forward to the day it can forget war and return to the enjoyable tourist trade. ●



Tong Doc Phuong business center and Chinese temple (below) in Cholon.



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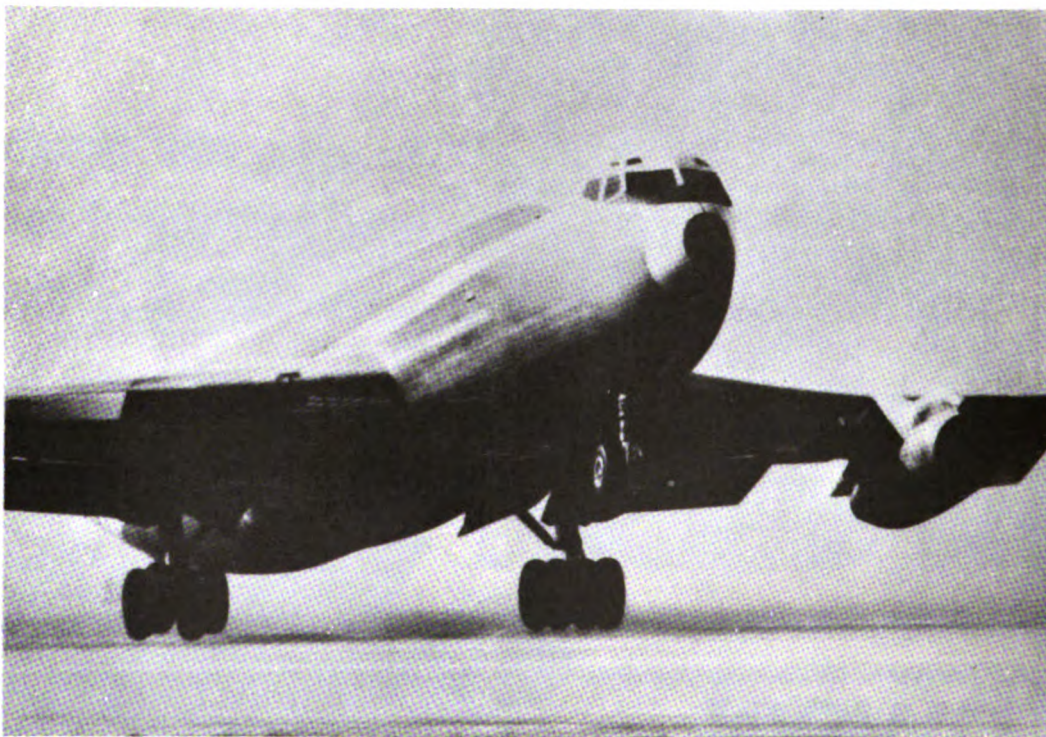


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