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David A. Biggs

Between the Rivers and Tides:
A Hydraulic History of the Mekong Delta, 1820-1975

David A. Biggs

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of the requirements for the degree of

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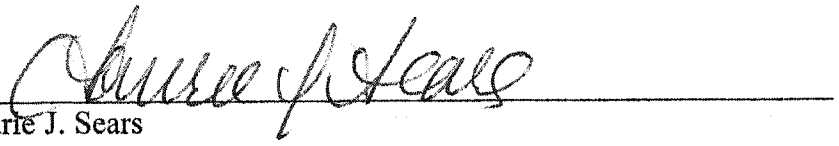
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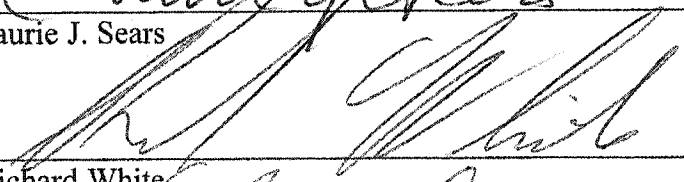


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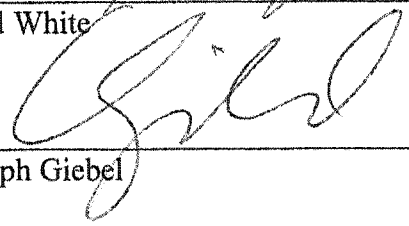
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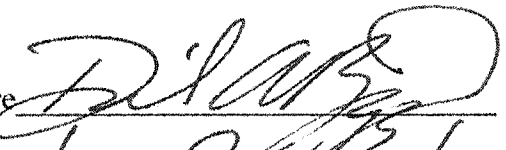
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Abstract

Between the Rivers and Tides:
A Hydraulic History of the Mekong Delta, 1820-1975

David A. Biggs

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Department of History

This historical study of the water environment and water projects in the Mekong Delta examines exchanges between engineers and local people that defined regional identities tied to the surrounding water landscape. Chapter One begins in 1820 with Nguyễn-era canal projects and histories of the region, this thesis traces the impacts of both physical water projects and the creation of spatial narratives that defined the region and its waterways as Vietnamese space. Chapter Two focuses on subsequent French colonial efforts to build a permanent water network through dredging and settlement measures from 1880-1930. Chapter Three examines the "agricultural crisis" and its roots in combined environmental and social problems during colonial rule. Chapter Four examines the post-1945 establishment of "liberated zones" and the effects of wartime responses to land redistribution in polarizing the water landscape Chapter Five examines the effect of the polarized landscape and escalated military conflict on the water landscape from 1960 to 1975, arguing that it resulted in a fragmentation of water

resources and management. Sources used include Nguyễn histories, French colonial engineering reports, Vietnamese public works documents, oral histories, and American military sources.

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GLOSSARY

administrateur: French colonial province chief

ấp chiến lược: strategic hamlet

assimilés: natives with French citizenship

Bà Chúa Xứ: Lady of the Land, Mekong Delta local deity

barrage: dam

bassin de chasse: flushing basin

casier: term used by French agronomists to describe the land form of dikes "encasing" rice plantations

cây giá: Ecoecaria agallocha, flood tolerant hardwood

cây mù u: Callophyllum inophyllum, oleoresinous tree

cây phãng: grass-cutting scythe

cây tràm: Malaleuca cajuputi, freshwater mangrove tree, "tea tree"

chủ điền: land owner

CORDS: Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support

curé: a Catholic neighborhood

Dinh Điền: 1957 policy for land reclamation through Agricultural Development Centers

dinh, doanh: administrative barracks, provincial seat

dôs d'âne: hogback ridges, sand bars, *lưng tôm*

DRVN: Democratic Republic of Việt Nam (1945-1975)

đại điền chủ: grand proprietor

đất bỏ hoàng: wasteland

đất hoàng: *terres abandonees*, abandoned land reverting to wilderness

địa bộ: traditional Vietnamese property lists

địa chủ: land owner

đồn điền: plantation

đường tượng: elephant road

engagés: contract laborers

giạ: rice measure, about 20 kg

giáp nước: water meeting point

HANSI: Hydraulique Agricole et Navigation de Sud Indochinois

hộc: unit of volume, about 10 liters

kênh, kinh: canal

khu trù mật: agroville

lác: *Cyperus digitatus*, grass

lúa ma: "phantom rice," "floating rice," Oryza rufipogon

lúa nếp: glutinous rice

lúa tẻ: non-glutinous rice

lục bình: water hyacinth, a floating weed

MACV: U.S. Military Assistance Command, Việt Nam (1960-1975)

mẫu: unit of area (about .5 hectares)

máy Kohler: Kohler 4hp or 12 hp engines used to power water pumps and boat engines

mētis: Greek term for know-how, local knowledge

MRF: Mobile Riverine Force, "brownwater navy"

MSUG: Michigan State University Group (1955 – 1962)

mương: irrigation ditch

năn: *Eleocharis*, "needle grass"

NLF: National Liberation Front

Nôm: a classical Vietnamese writing system derived from Chinese ideographic characters

OICC: U.S. Navy Office in Charge of Construction

Ông Tà: Khmer deity, god of prosperity

PAVN: People's Army of Việt Nam

phát cỏ: cutting grass

phèn: alum, acid sulphate

phố: urban prefecture

phong thủy: feng-shui

phương: unit of weight, about 25 kilograms

quan: standardized wooden rack of zinc coins

quê hương: home country

rạch: creek, arroyo

RVN: Republic of Việt Nam (1956-1975)

SFEDTP: *Société Française d'Entreprises de Dragages et de Travaux Publics*, French dredging enterprise operating from 1913 – 1960.

SRVN: Socialist Republic of Việt Nam (1975-)

tá điền: tenant farmer

thành: citadel

tỉnh: province with civilian administration

tổng đốc: Vietnamese canton chief, colonial era

USAID: U.S. Agency for International Development

USOM-VN: US Operations Mission, Việt Nam (1950 – 1960)

văn minh: civilization

xuồng: wooden longboat

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DEDICATION

To Mom and Dad.

INTRODUCTION



Figure 0.1: Chờ Gạo Canal, 1876: This print attributed to Emile Gsell (circa 1876-1877) shows the construction of canal banks by *corvée*. Source: Albumin photo on paper, presented to Governor Le Myre de Vilers by the Colonial Council in 1882. Donated to the Foreign Affairs Library in 1894. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Paris, "Le Myre de Vilers" No. A000760.

Life in the Mekong Delta is intimately tied to water. Water from the Mekong River, the monsoon showers, and the rising and falling tides moves through almost every thing. Vietnamese books and television shows often use terms such as "river-water civilization" (*văn minh sông nước*) or "canal-creek civilization" (*văn minh kênh rạch*) to describe this unique society on the water—suggesting that Vietnamese civilization

here is somewhat awash, not as firmly lodged in terra firma. The effect of this location of "civilization" in such a fluid environment results in a fusing of the modern, nationalist idea of "civilization" to something in constant flux, moving with the ebb and flow of the rivers and tides.[1]

In little more than 200 years, through settlement, public works, and warfare, humans have altered almost every aspect of this fluid landscape. As waves of Vietnamese farmers migrated into the region in the 19th century, new canals became an important feature of the Nguyễn Court's campaigns to prevent Siamese incursions and control the local economy. Under colonial rule from 1867 to 1945, public works engineers coordinated one of the most ambitious dredging campaigns of the day, facilitating rapid land conversions and population increases (Figure 0.1). In the wars that followed, the same canals and swamps became grounds for a more global contest involving competing Vietnamese forces, France, Japan, The United States, China and the Soviet Union in the Indochina Wars. During a trip to the Mekong Delta in 1968, American journalist Peter White described the Mekong River as one of "terror and hope" as he

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[1] The term "civilization" (*văn minh*) is a relatively recent term to be used in Vietnamese. Nguyễn Văn Huyền published *The Ancient Civilization of Vietnam* as an instructional text in Hà Nội in 1944 in an effort to replace older, colonial textbooks that taught primarily French history. Dr. Huyền received his doctorate at the Sorbonne in 1934 and was a member of the French School of the Far-East (*Ecole Française de l'Extrême-Orient*) before working as Minister of Education in Hồ Chí Minh's government from 1946-1976. Nguyễn Văn Huyền, *La civilization annamite* (Hanoi: Direction de l'instruction publique, 1944). Sơn Nam, one of the delta's most read authors, has perhaps extended this fusion term the farthest by combining the colloquial southern term *miệt* (an area or region, a piece) in Sơn Nam, *Văn Minh Miệt Vườn* (Hà Nội: NXB Văn Hoá, 1992). The concept of "ebb and flow" and its linkages to natural phenomena, is however quite common in Vietnamese poetry and literature. In his classic epic, Nguyễn Du uses the term "bể dâu" in line 5 as an allusion to the Chinese collection, *Stories of Gods and Fairies*, to relate the ups and downs of human life with the transition of the sea into mulberry fields and vice versa. See Nguyễn Du, *The Tale of Kiều: A Bilingual Edition*, trans. Huỳnh Sanh Thông (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 169.

followed an American marine platoon through the mangroves of Bến Tre.[2] Since then, the wartime landscape has faded into a more idyllic scene of crowded waterways (*mạng lưới kênh rạch chằng chịt*) and endless rice fields and orchards.

Controlling water was essential to governance. At inauguration ceremonies, heads of state often visited new canal projects to highlight the importance of the work as a kind of national object, a new instrument created through state investment to convert "wilderness" into "civilization." While this sort of rhetorical staging was most common during colonial rule, it was not unique to that period. In 1817 and 1825, stone carvers acting on the orders of the Vietnamese Court installed commemorative steles at the bases of two small mountains bordering canals recently completed by General Thoại Ngọc Hầu's army of conscript laborers. Later, over the course of more than three decades of fighting against French and American-led forces, revolutionary engineers also celebrated their own projects intended to "liberate" territory controlled by the enemy. This subversive form of "engineering" was also built upon a carefully calculated attempt to control water in such a way that protected the insurgency and limited enemy dredges and boats. Water projects were not only an extension of the state into a local area. During periods of war and resistance they were also subjects of that opposition, sites for re-engineering to suit alternative goals.

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[2] Peter T. White and W.E. Garrett, "The Mekong: River of Terror and Hope," *National Geographic* 134, No. 6 (December 1968): 737-789.

This thesis is a study of the relationships between the water environment and recent human events in the Mekong Delta from 1820 to 1975. It examines how water figured into successive efforts to establish different forms of government in the region beginning with water projects of the Nguyễn Court and ending with the fall of the Sài Gòn government in 1975. In this story, water engineers figure prominently as central characters, mediating between the local environment and different human communities. In their design of projects and negotiations with different parties, they lived figuratively and literally between the rivers and tides in the Mekong Delta. It extends the definition of "engineers" beyond the ranks of university-trained specialists and government cadres to include the much broader groups of farmers and rebels who played a major role in shaping this environment. Millions of farmers have over this same period collectively and independently expanded finer threads of the water network, using it to produce rice and other crops. During periods of war, tens of thousands of insurgents and military planners also altered the water landscape in their efforts to "liberate" or "control" rural populations.

In a place where "the state" was built on shifting alliances of Vietnamese, Chinese, Khmer, French, and American actors, projects were often complicated by multiple state visions often acting simultaneously. With regards to the high modernist projects of the colonial French state and in the years following 1954, this thesis extends James C. Scott's idea of "state visions" to the activities of French, Vietnamese and American

engineers in the Mekong Delta.[3] Like the projects he mentions, irrigation and resettlement schemes from the 1930's onwards sought to rebuild nature and local human societies along the problematic notions of a mechanized pastoral ideal. Besides the inability of colonial and post-colonial governments to address traumatic social crises for tenant farmers and the rural poor, the problem with such "state visions" in the Mekong Delta was that this ideal was shaped from multiple sources: French colonial and Vichy notions, Vietnamese neo-traditionalist ideas, and American post-WWII Marshall Plan strategies. Individual land projects were subverted not only by revolutionaries and corrupt local officials but also by often-competing camps of Vietnamese, French, and American officials. The resulting picture of an engineered water landscape in the delta is one shaped by many layers of projects, some completed and others abandoned, over time.

Another important aspect of water projects was the exchange in ideas and knowledge between outsiders and locals. In the colonial period, dredging crews directed towering, steam-powered machines into remote, often forested regions of the Mekong Delta. This reconfiguration of water and land caused disruptions but it also created new opportunities for incoming settlers. Dredges and the hydraulic machines that followed them into the delta achieved multiple ends at the same time. They facilitated settlement

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[3] James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1998). Scott's recent work is a compelling indictment of large-scale state projects, citing the myriad problems that arose from failures to allow significant local participation. It covers a wide range of "failed" schemes including collective farms, planned cities and managed forests. It argues that all of these projects failed because they did not incorporate the more flexible, working knowledge possessed by local communities.

for some who followed behind the machines while they bankrupting others whose land was ruined by the new canals. They also served important political ends, making some land owners wealthy and ensuring their support for the colonial government. This exchange of information and technology was two-way; engineers and surveyors also learned from local people. Especially during the "agricultural crisis" of the 1930's, French agronomists and irrigation experts studied the "local genius" of traditional irrigation practices (what Scott calls *mētis*) and then attempted to incorporate that "genius" into subsequent projects.[4] During three decades of insurgent warfare, this exchange often became more acute and violent, as both revolutionaries and foreign troops learned how to survive in the waterways and wetlands from locals.

This thesis focuses on the continuities and linkages between specific projects and this constantly shifting local environment. It approaches canals and other water projects as sites for inter-connected physical and social exchanges, and it explores these exchanges and their relationship to broader historical events in the region. New technologies and ideas transformed the water environment into a hybrid, human-natural environment through mechanization, irrigation, and new species of crops, wild plants and animals. These exchanges also brought important social changes, redefining through new

[4] Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 309. He uses the Greek term *mētis* to differentiate local forms of technical "know-how" from other forms of more precise, mathematical knowledge (*techne*) associated with state engineers and other technicians. For his discussion on *mētis*, see Chapter 9, "Thin Simplifications and Practical Knowledge: Mētis," 309-341.

constructions (and wartime destruction) human life in the region.[5] With this emphasis on the role of water and technology in these specific exchanges between engineers and local people, the central plot of this history follows a web of multiple narrative threads happening simultaneously. Like the shifting channels of creeks and rivers in the Mekong Delta, such a hydraulic history includes many local narratives of "progress" and "decline" happening simultaneously.

Sources and Methods

The historical materials that form the basis for this analysis range from official Court histories in the 1800's to colonial and pre-1975 public works folios and American aid and military documents. The public works folios in Vietnamese, French and American archives contained a wide range of materials including technical reports, maps, budgets, official correspondence, newspaper clippings, and private letters. They also contained copies of documents from other departments of government as issues of internal security, foreign cooperation or legal rights pertained to specific projects.

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[5] This notion of hybridization caused by new technology and ideas has been popularized in such works as Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 52. Latour uses the term "quasi-object" to describe instruments and constructed physical sites that are inseparable assemblages of natural and social elements. In *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 150, Donna J. Haraway argues that humanity itself is reconfigured by the adoption of new technologies and the re-ordering of nature-human relationships. She suggests the idea of "cyborgs" to describe the resulting human-technology hybrids that result.

Public works documents offer a richly varied glimpse into the workings of state engineers in successive regimes from the French colonial to different incarnations of a Vietnamese state ending in 1975. By following the public works programs in the delta over these different regimes, what becomes apparent is the extent to which many individuals crossed over from one regime to the next, carrying with them debates and ideas formulated during earlier public works campaigns. Public works documents also complicate pictures of government agencies in the past as anything but unilateral organizations. Engineers were often placed in the center of intense disputes involving home institutions in France or America, changes in leadership within the administration, or strategically important military conflicts. From Chief Engineer to field surveyors and office clerks, the "state's role" in water projects was complicated; it consisted of shaky coalitions that often changed among entrepreneurs, engineers, administrators and others.

These folios also contain supplemental documents that describe some local experiences associated with major water projects—letters from village leaders, field assessments and other evidence of local opinions. In research, these extra materials were invaluable in describing a small but influential section of rural people who were literate—shopkeepers, landowners, village leaders, people of mixed French descent, and some recent immigrants to the region. Like ideas of "the state," the idea of any single representative "local person" in delta society is broken down by various ethnic,

religious, geographic, and ideological ties. The delta population was very diverse. Besides a comparatively tiny number of French planters and soldiers, there were Vietnamese, Khmer, Cham and Chinese communities that further identified themselves to regions within China, Vietnam and Cambodia. It was not uncommon for a local minority to feel more common ground at various moments with other "foreigners" than with the majority "locals." Colonial legal documents involving plaintiffs suing Public Works for damages caused by certain waterways shows that women and their mixed-race children occupied an even more complicated legal and cultural space somewhere between identifying themselves as Vietnamese or French. Among other groups, especially Vietnamese and Chinese, similar cross-identities were common. The boundary between local and outsider in the delta was a relatively wide, fuzzy margin inhabited by many influential persons who brokered relations between different cultures. Impressions of this large mix of people in the Mekong Delta complement other studies of colonial life in Southeast Asia such as Jean Gelman Taylor's study of Javanese women and Dutch men during the later years of Dutch East India Company rule in the 1700's.[6]

The people that appear least in archival sources were not surprisingly the most populous: several million persons who were illiterate, lived by farming and generally

---

[6] Jean Gelman Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia: European and Eurasian in Dutch Asia* (Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983). For a history of how these racial categories for Eurasians and native women changed in the 19th and 20th centuries, see Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's 'History of Sexuality' and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 101-116.

avoided contact with government officials. Like the fluid categories of state agents and local elites, the "rural poor" do not readily conform to any single set of definitions either. They lived within dynamic ethnic and geographic enclaves established from different origins. Besides a tiny number of colonial planters and a stream of ethnic Chinese involved in business enterprises and agriculture, poorer migrants continued moving to the Mekong Delta in the tens of thousands each year from other parts of Vietnam and Cambodia. These groups identified by "homeland" (*quê hương*), the time of their arrival in the delta, and especially during the resettlement campaigns of the 1950's, by religious and ideological ties. Like engineers and local elites, the category of "rural poor" encompasses a history of shifting alliances.

Especially after the onset of the world economic crisis in 1930 and the formation of nationalist political parties inspired by the radical politics of Socialists in Europe and East Asia, the rural poor generally fell under a term used in government and urban areas as "tenant farmer" (*tá điền*). As political tensions eventually led to the Indochina Wars, "tenant farmers" figured as one of the most important targets for government and guerilla propaganda. They were the "hearts and minds" that American war planners sought to convert. This overwhelming focus of attention on *tá điền*, however, continued the process of obscuring more personal and contingent views of individual farmers, tradesmen, wives, mothers, cousins, monks, etc. Recent concern about the representation of women, the poor, and other persons who have not historically

occupied center stage in the sources has fostered growth of an academic field called "subaltern studies" that explores questions of representation, ethics and voice in new ways.[7] Allowing space in the historical narrative for these voices, no matter how patchy the final portrayal, allows at least some room for locally autonomous histories within larger narratives.[8]

My approach to the relative absence of rural voices in the archives was to resituate a part of my research outside the government archives in Hồ Chí Minh City and spend time talking to people living in the countryside. Given limitations of time and access, my impression of local farmers' experiences is certainly biased towards a small subset of this population – impressions gathered through conversations, visits to sites, and oral histories (Appendix A).[9] While the resulting transcripts provide only a small set of stories, they form an important counterbalance, supporting the idea of farmers as "engineers" and "local experts" who possess what Scott calls hands-on knowledge or *mētis*.

---

[7] Subaltern refers to those who have little voice or power in traditional archival sources or socially in the past. Works particularly by South Asian scholars raise important methodological questions about how historians treat peasant agency and conversely how they treat issues of colonial or state hegemony especially in rural areas. See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 171-197. See also Partha Chatterjee, "Was There a Hegemonic Project of the Colonial State?" *Contesting Colonial Hegemony: State & Society in Africa and India.* Dagmar Engels and Shula Marks, eds. (London: British Academic Press, 1994), 79-84. See Dipesh Chakrabarty. "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts?" *Representations* 37 (Winter 1992), 1-26.

[8] John Smail's essay on "autonomous history" is an early yet still provocative essay on the conflicts between nationalist and local interpretations of history. John R.W. Smail, "On the Possibility of an Autonomous History of Modern Southeast Asia," *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 2 (1961), 72-102. See also Laurie Sears, ed. *Autonomous Histories, Particular Truths: Essays in Honor of John Smail,* Monograph 11 (Madison WI: UW Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1993).

[9] I am indebted to the excellent work of my colleague, Lê Thị Huyền, at Cần Thơ University who, together with her father who grew up in the delta countryside, worked to transcribe the taped interviews from colloquial Vietnamese and then translate them into English.

These oral histories are not statistically representative of the delta's rural population given the many different types of rural communities; but they are invaluable in contextualizing specific state projects that occurred in the vicinity of individual farmers' homes. Armed with photocopied materials on specific canal projects, major plantations, and agricultural surveys of the local area, I engaged them with a basic set of questions about past projects and associated social and environmental consequences. For example, with three respondents living near the site of the first strategic hamlet in the delta (Vị Thanh), I asked about the construction of the strategic hamlet and surrounding infrastructure. Generally, I let the conversations follow farmers' interests with only some guiding questions that focused attention to environmental and water issues.

The resulting picture of the pre-colonial Mekong Delta differs significantly from the later documents, but the rough picture of a pre-colonial past that is nevertheless important to an understanding the history of engineers and rebels that followed. The collection of 19th century sources is perhaps the most problematic given the scarcity of available documents describing pre-colonial projects. The pre-colonial archive is limited to recent editions of Court histories and chronicles, translated from Nôm and Chinese into modern Vietnamese, and other collections of other translated documents. Vietnamese historians and authors such as Sơn Nam also draw upon their own memory of local legends and stories; I rely on these secondary Vietnamese histories to shape perspectives on local delta society in the early half of the 19th century. Foreign visitors,

especially European emissaries and missionaries, also noted occasional details about settlements and water projects; but this information is generally scattered. A pre-colonial sketch of Vietnamese projects, expansions and rebellions in the delta helps define the boundaries of local tensions that played into successive colonial and post-colonial actions. The small library of Vietnamese documents resulting from 19th century Vietnamese surveys and histories also played into colonial understandings of the pre-existing Vietnamese state. This kind of double translation from local observation to Vietnamese texts and Vietnamese texts to French texts meant that successive colonial and even post-colonial Vietnamese projects were built from pre-existing Vietnamese notions. Since the withdrawal of American troops from the region in 1975, this older history of regional tensions has again emerged as an important constraint to new policies.

With a few exceptions, most secondary literature on the Mekong Delta consists of popular and scholarly works written by Vietnamese authors over the past fifty years. Perhaps the single best-known Vietnamese authority on the delta's rural past is the writer Son Nam. Versed extensively in American and French literature, his popular histories such as *Văn Minh Miệt Vườn* (Garden Area Civilization) and *Đồng Bằng Sông Cửu Long: Nét Sinh Hoạt Xưa* (The Mekong Delta: Features of Life in the Past) often mix traditional Vietnamese historical themes with tropes more common in western history. In *Đồng Bằng Sông Cửu Long* for example, he likens Vietnamese expansion

southward into the delta in the 18th and 19th centuries as a similar sort of pioneering to American westward expansion, a concept "introduced in novels and the silver screen."[10] His work and that of others such as Huỳnh Lứa's edited volume *Lịch Sử Khai Phá Vùng Đất Nam Bộ* are important syntheses of Vietnamese and foreign sources on contemporary history in the Mekong Delta, especially describing late Nguyễn and early colonial history.[11]

Many of these secondary works understandably attempt to fit interpretations of the local past into broader nationalist or revolutionary narratives. Struggles over water projects at various times often fit within larger narratives of "southward expansion" (*nam tiến*) or "resistance to foreign aggression". American historian Keith Taylor recently addressed this historiographical issue in an essay critiquing his own past work, *Birth of Việt Nam*. Here he challenges historians to consider the more locally autonomous "historical surfaces" of particular events in particular local settings.[12] While some secondary works in Vietnamese are limited by such determinism, the revolutionary memoirs especially are still important in that they often relate local experiences of those opposed to the colonial and post-colonial governments. Memoirs can serve as a

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[10] Sơn Nam, *Đồng Bằng Sông Cửu Long: Nét Sinh Hoạt Xưa* (TP HCM: NXB Thành Phố Hồ Chí Minh, 1993), 15. See also Sơn Nam, *Văn Minh Miệt Vườn* (TP HCM: NXB Văn Hoá, 1992). One important French contribution to the historiography is Pierre Brocheux's work on the Mekong Delta. Brocheux, half Vietnamese and raised in his early life in the Mekong Delta, wrote numerous essays and works on the delta. See Pierre Brocheux. *The Mekong Delta: Ecology, Economy, and Revolution, 1860-1960* (Madison WI: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1995). This work traces the economic conflicts suffered by tenant farmers in the Mekong Delta and suggests that their support for the Việt Minh and the NLF was largely due to economic factors.

[11] Huỳnh Lứa, ed, *Lịch Sử Khai Phá Vùng Đất Nam Bộ* (TP HCM: NXB Thành Phố Hồ Chí Minh, 1987).

[12] Keith W. Taylor, "Surface Orientations in Vietnam: Beyond Histories of Nation and Region," *Journal of Asian Studies* 57, No. 4 (November 1998): 949-978.

counterbalance, despite their patriotic bias, to government documents that generally portrayed the Việt Minh and the NLF as "enemies of civilization." Memoirs help present the complex and long-standing efforts by revolutionaries to alternately "liberate" rural areas from harsh political and economic conditions.

Finally, this thesis applies "ideas about nature" and environmental change from the relatively new field of environmental history. Very generally, environmental historians ask questions about how non-human nature plays into human history. On one level, this analysis may focus on the role of disasters or land development in either destroying or building human societies. Donald Worster's *Dust Bowl* is one important early work in this tradition, examining how soil erosion and drought in the American Midwest in the 1930's was directly tied to the economic and political effects of the Great Depression.[13] Other works such as Richard White's *Middle Ground* have explored in more detail the problems of differing cultural ideas about nature between aboriginal and European actors in frontier areas of the Great Lakes Region in North America.[14] This work is important in its exploration of the sites where trade and exchange occurred, showing how ideas of the state, of natives, and of nature were not fixed but shifted over time. I adopted a similar questioning of water projects in the Mekong Delta, examining them as social, technological and historical meeting places where farmers, laborers, villagers,

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[13] Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930's* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1979).
[14] Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

men and women mixed with Europeans, mandarins, engineers, entrepreneurs, investors, mechanics, and scientists. Canals, irrigation networks, and flood control structures continue to be an important "middle ground" for exchanges between these various groups.

By bringing this largely American – centered approach to a Southeast Asian location, this thesis also raises questions about current assumptions in environmental history. Recent works by historians such as Richard Grove explore how many ideas now common in global debates over climate change and forest loss were originally rooted in colonial sites and not Europe. With colonial power behind them, scientists used forests in India, Southeast Asia and Africa as laboratories to study effects of various environmental changes. He argues that now common ideas of preserving nature or restoring a degraded landscape to some utopian or "edenic" original state was based on Western observations of ecosystems where scientists often ignored or failed to protect the roles that indigenous people played in maintaining these places.[15] This work continues this examination of intersections between colonialism and "green thought" through its examination in particular of colonial engineers' approaches to the "agricultural crisis" in the 1930's.

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[15] Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens, and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Such an examination of "green thought" and environmental history in this research on the Mekong Delta ties into the field of subaltern studies by attempting to draw out alternative views of nature from the millions of rural people who lived outside of the reach of government scientists and engineers. Attempting to avoid the Orientalist trap of romanticizing indigenous environmental knowledge, one aim of this work remains to show multiple "ideas of nature" operating at any given moment in the recent past. Water projects often served as important exchange points for these different ideas; a failed project often led agricultural and hydraulic engineers to further examine local knowledge to better understand local environmental relationships.

Organization

The thesis is organized into five chapters describing water projects in the broader context of nation-building in the Mekong Delta with one Appendix including transcripts of the oral history interviews. Chapter One introduces aspects of pre-colonial history in the Mekong Delta, arguing that successive French and post-colonial views towards development of the delta were shaped in part by this history of pre-colonial projects, literary production, and conflicts. Chapter Two describes early French, colonial efforts to implement mechanical dredging equipment and new hydraulic engineering techniques as part of a new campaign to convert unsettled regions of the delta into a growing water network. Here, there was not any singular colonial vision at work over

fifty years; but instead a shifting web of constructive alliances that allowed particular arrangements of investment, labor, machines and ideas to persist until continuing problems mounted and eroded these alliances.

Chapter Three then focuses in more detail on the nature of these environmental and social catastrophes that escalated in the 1930's and led to an "agricultural crisis." This "crisis" fostered new colonial ideas about irrigation, an interest in "traditional" agriculture, and broader nationalist critiques of the colonial economy. Chapter Four follows the development of two, polarized campaigns to alternately "liberate" and "control" the rural areas through the competing water projects of revolutionaries and the state. This chapter also examines the roles that American advisors and engineers played in this polarized rural environment from 1954 to 1960. Chapter Five covers the more fragmentary effects of a prolonged and intensely violent "American War." It examines how various kinds of isolation brought about by the war shaped delta society and nature. The Appendix to this work is intended as a reference for interested readers and students, given the relative absence of primary historical documents from farmers in this area. A brief introduction to the process of obtaining the histories and locating interviewees precedes the transcripts.

CHAPTER I: MAKING THE VIETNAMESE DELTA (1820 – 1859)

The relatively modern work of "imagining" the delta as a regular part of the Vietnamese state—through written and public works—was not begun by the colonial government but the Nguyễn Court before it.[1] Since the 1600's, the Nguyễn Lords had participated in negotiations and wars with the Cambodian Kingdom to gain and expand Vietnamese settlements and forts in the Mekong Delta. In the 1780's, the delta was also a major civil war battleground between the Tây Sơn and Nguyễn armies.[2] Under the Nguyễn kings after 1802, the delta again was a scene for a major war against Lê Văn Khôi's rebel army. The incorporation of this water terrain into a shifting Vietnamese kingdom was not a steady or singular process, but one built after many local "successes" and "failures" in land development, navigation, and irrigation.

The conceptual and physical re-ordering of rivers, creeks, forts, and villages by Vietnamese mandarins, generals and writers in the early 19th century was essential to the creation of a common spatial narrative of progressive settlement, governance and water management in the decades before the colonial conquest. Understanding how this narrative was constructed through physical works, instruments, and language is important, because colonial surveyors and administrators later adopted it wholesale in

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[1] Here the use of the term "imagining" is in reference to Benedict O.G. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (London: Verso, 2nd Edition, 1991).
[2] George E. Dutton, "The Tây Son Uprising : Society and Rebellion in Late Eighteenth-Century Viêt Nam, 1771-1802," PhD Thesis (University of Washington, 2001).

their early attempts to construct their own networks of waterways and government communications after 1867. Using translated copies of Vietnamese geographies and histories, the French adopted Vietnamese literary tropes, and their connections with landscape solidified a more singular, colonial interpretation of a pre-colonial environmental past that was anything but singular.

One of the first major Vietnamese written works on the Mekong Delta, *Writings on Gia Định* (*Gia Định Thành Thông Chí*) was an extremely formalized interpretation of the water landscape with frequent allusions to Chinese classical terms and texts.[3] Book II began with the following phrase: "Mountains are the bones of the earth, water the blood, nurturing circulation so that human communities may arise from the earth." It continues with citations of several Chinese classic texts describing important legendary mountains in China that define its features, finally concluding with the advice that to know a region, one must be able to identify all of its major rivers and mountains. Đức then makes the special point that their names were not important and adopting local terms was sufficient. What was important was to know the largest mountains and rivers, the "ancestral sources," and then distinguish and divide the smaller streams and hills, their "children."[4] The purpose of this hierarchical rather than nominative

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[3] Trịnh Hoài Đức, *Gia Định Thành Thông Chí*, trans. Đỗ Mộng Khương and Nguyễn Ngọc Tỉnh. Đào Duy Anh, ed. (Hà Nội: NXB Giáo Dục, 1998), 6. Originally published in 1820 in the demotic Han script, *Nôm*. Hereafter referred to as *GĐTTC*.

[4] *GĐTTC*, 19.

classification, according to Đức, was so that over time changing local names would not confuse people.

Writings then was a radical re-imagination of the Mekong Delta, flexible in its admission of place names from mixed Khmer, Vietnamese and Chinese origins and strict in its application of a classical Chinese organization of the landscape into a hierarchical order of "ancestors" and "children". Such a text was not so much an article for popular consumption as it was a manual of land, water and people management. It nurtured the idea of the Mekong Delta as one coherent region, organized according to the spatial and figurative principles familiar to a mandarin or general versed in Chinese classics.

While its immediate effect on local communities was probably negligible, the effect of these written works on present-day interpretations of the Mekong Delta's past is profound. First, by ordering the mountains, rivers, history, customs and inhabitants into one coherent system, Writings helped establish the idea of the delta's people, rivers and mountains belonging within one coherent social landscape, organized further into provinces, districts and villages. Second, by using measures and metaphors derived from a classical Chinese model of ideal geography, Writings suggests that even if mandarins and generals spoke different languages to each other, they operated within a world that was structured on the same kinds of units and the same stories. With Khmer

governors still administering the remaining srok – Gò Cong, Sóc Trang, and Trà Vĩnh – in the early 1800's, it was unlikely that local jurisdictions were so connected. Third, *Writings* served as a foundational source for a number of Nguyễn histories that followed. Given the lack of other written sources to draw from, the same version of the delta's history repeated many times in later works—even a French translation!—has had the effect of diminishing the importance of a more localized, fragmented environmental past.

This chapter then follows the creation of this Nguyễn spatial narrative from the 1820's and sets it within more complicated local environments and histories. I borrow from Lefebvre's notion of "space" that includes representational, symbolic, and physical and temporal elements. It is something that is continually changing, defined and altered by human events but also itself playing a role in shaping subsequent human projects.[5] It sets a relative starting point for the Nguyễn story in 1820 when Trịnh Hoài Đức wrote *Writings on Gia Định* and Nguyễn military governors such as Nguyễn Văn Thoại initiated major new canal projects in the western frontier. Before examining these

[5] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*. trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 7-27. The term "space" is one that is especially loaded and deserves qualification before continuing with a notion of "Vietnamese space" in this chapter. I adopt Lefebvre's observation that the term "space" is really a configuration of multiple forms: measured physical space, symbolic space delineated with monuments and human constructions—roads, canals, etc—and a rhetorical or cultural space represented in books, stories, and graphics. Lefebvre's hypotheses (points IV – XIII) describe many different forms implied by the single term ("l'espace"). He further complicates the "science of space" by arguing that it should not be considered as something frozen in time but instead as an entity perpetually being produced and reproduced with relation to human actions. Such spaces influence and shape successive human events.

works, however, this chapter presents a brief overview of the geology and ancient history lying underneath the Nguyễn story.

Geology and Ancient History of the Mekong Delta

The delta region of the Mekong River covers an area of approximately 5.9 million hectares with 4 million hectares of that located in present-day Việt Nam.[6] (Figure 1.1) It is bordered by the Gulf of Thailand in the west and the South China Sea in the east. Tidal surges from these two water basins create an extremely complex hydrological matrix that affects water quality and water flow over 100 kilometers inland. The lower region of the Mekong Delta, that area mostly included within Vietnamese territory, is extremely flat, with elevation rising on average only about one meter from the South China Sea to the international border at Châu Đốc.

The underlying space image of the Mekong Delta in Figure 1.1 suggests the intensity of geological and hydraulic forces that shape the Mekong Delta through sedimentation and tidal movements. A recent history of historic, human presence within the last 3000 years is nested within this geologic setting of intense riverine, tidal and monsoon forces. The Mekong Delta formed over 2 million years ago in the late Tertiary period. Ancient, early terraces of the river delta formed over 1 million years ago. As late as 6000 BCE,

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[6] Võ Tòng Xuân and Shigeo Matsui, eds, *Development Of Farming Systems In The Mekong Delta Of Vietnam* (Hồ Chí Minh City: Hồ Chí Minh City Publishing House, 1998), 18. The total area of the Mekong Delta extending from Kompong Cham in Cambodia to the South China Sea.

inland areas were still periodically inundated with salt water corresponding with a high sea-level episode that has since receded to near-present levels.[7]

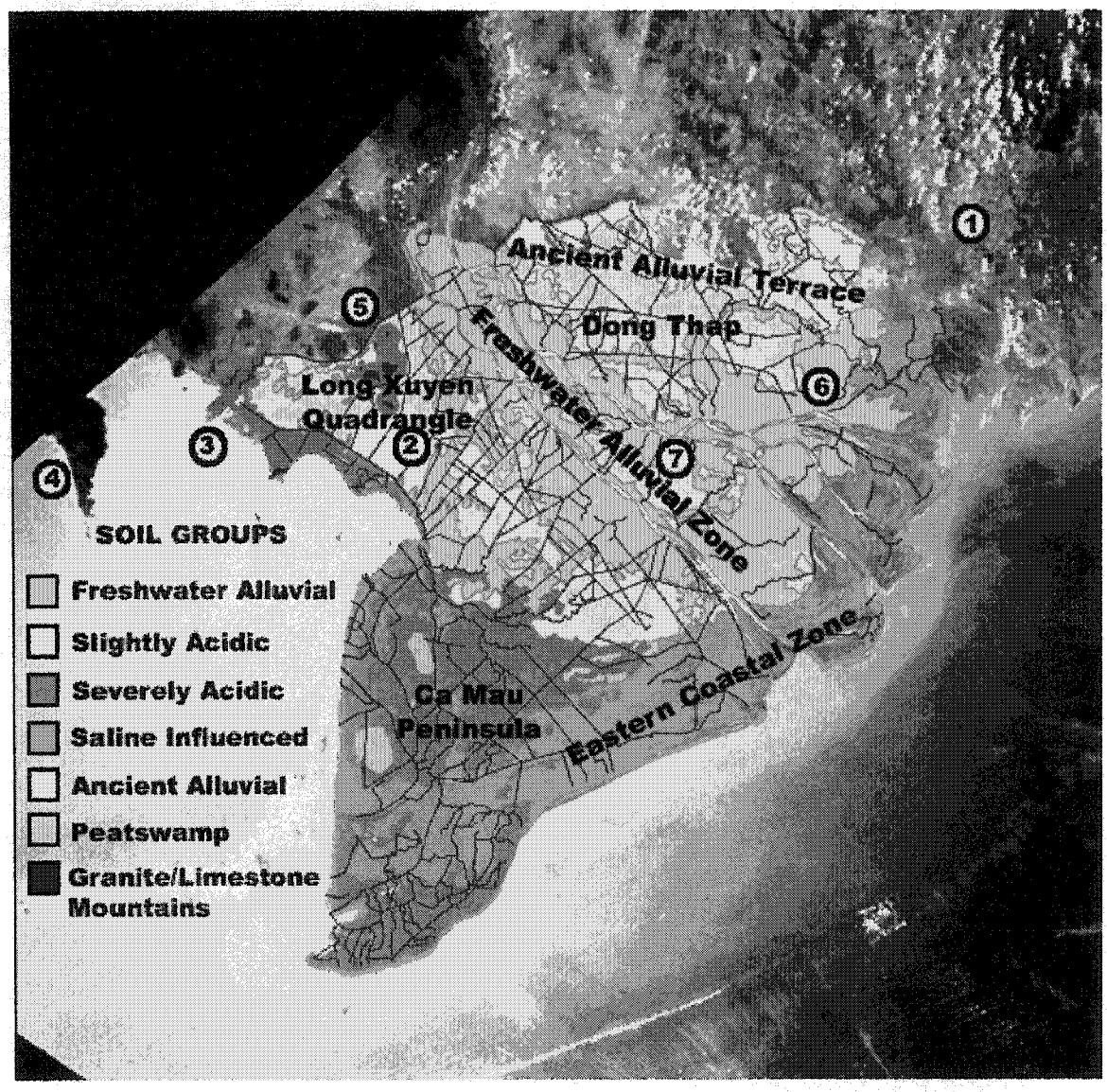


Figure 1.1: Soil Groups and Key Landmarks of the Mekong Delta: The above map shows the major regions and soil types in the Mekong Delta. Acidic soil is typically associated with more poorly drained

[7] Nguyễn Hưu Chiếm provides an excellent introduction of the (Vietnamese) delta's geologic history in the first chapter of his dissertation thesis. See Nguyễn Hưu Chiếm, "Studies on Agro-Ecological Environment and Land Use in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam" (PhD diss., Kyoto University, 1994), 1-17. This dissertation is particularly useful for English audiences because it integrates historical sources in English and French on the region's geologic history as well as more contemporary Vietnamese works.

soil, indicating lower elevations and depressions. The densest areas of habitation correspond generally with the freshwater alluvial zone and slightly acidic soils. The circled numbers refer to the following landmarks: 1) Gia Định / Sài Gòn / HCM City; 2) Ba Thê Mountain / Oc Èo located just east, and the Thoại Hà Canal (1817) further east; 3) Hà Tiên port; 4) Phú Quốc Island; 5) Vĩnh Tế Canal (1824) / Cambodian Frontier; 6) Mỹ Tho / Bảo Định Canal (1818) to NW; 7) Vĩnh Thành / Vĩnh Long. The blue lines depict contemporary waterways. Sources: The shaded layers and canal features were digitized from 1/250.000 topographic maps and attributed in MapInfo 5.0. The underlying space photograph of the Mekong Delta is courtesy of Earth Sciences and Image Analysis Laboratory, NASA Johnson Space Center (Image Record STS075_STS075-721-47). The original image was transformed using a third degree polynomial transformation and then georefernced to approximate UTM WGS 84 coordinates using Erdas Imagine 8.0 software. The composite image above was rendered by the author using Adobe Photoshop 5.0.

To understand the lower delta region in rough agricultural and ecological terms , it can be sub-divided into agro-ecological regions defined by hydrologic and geologic conditions: a freshwater alluvial zone, the Đồng Tháp Floodplain, the Long Xuyên Quadrangle, the eastern coastal zone, and the Cà Mau Peninsula. (See Figure 1.1) The freshwater alluvial plains alongside the major rivers and creeks is the richest natural agricultural region, and it is in these long narrow alluvial banks where most orchards and dense settlements are located. The high clay banks along well-drained waterways allow easy irrigation and provide a base for orchards and villages above flood levels.

The largest regions of the delta are two depressed flood plains on either side of the main Mekong branches. These regions are less well-suited for irrigated rice and flood annually. The Long Xuyên Quadrangle is south of the main river. The Quadrangle is remarkable for granite and limestone mountains that rise steeply from 200 to 700 meters and form island ecosystems above the floodplain. One of the earliest archaeological sites of the "Fu Nan" or "Oc Eo" civilization (300 BCE – 550 CE) is located at the base

of one of these mountains, Núi Ba Thê.[8] The Đồng Tháp Floodplain occupies the area north of the main river branches, and it is also called the "Plain of Reeds" for the vast fields of reeds (sậy) that grow in the flooded regions.

The landscape in the eastern coastal zone is defined by alternating rows of sand ridges and back swamps parallel to the coastline. During the dry season, salt water from the coast inundates the lower areas, preventing year-round cultivation without use of dikes and irrigation. The Cà Mau Peninsula is geologically the youngest portion of the delta and is formed by the deposition of silt south of the main river mouths. The word "Cà Mau" comes from the Khmer *Tuk Khmau* meaning "black water" and refers to the high levels of tannins found in the water here. Interior soils here include a layer of peat that is shown on Figure 1.1.[9]

Archeological excavations in the delta suggest that areas especially in the Long Xuyên Quadrangle and Đồng Tháp may have been densely inhabited before 700 CE.[10]

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[8] For an historical description based on epigraphs and Chinese histories, see George Coedès, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, ed. Walter F. Vella and trans. Susan Brown Cowing (Honolulu HI: East-West Center Press, 2nd Edition, 1967).

[9] The occurrence of peat soils in Southeast Asia is still a relatively poorly understood phenomenon. For an excellent summary of peat soil regions in the Mekong Delta and Southeast Asia, see E. Maltby, C.P. Immirzi, and R.J. Safford, ed, *Tropical Lowland Peatlands of Southeast Asia: Proceedings of a Workshop on Integrated Planning and Management of Tropical Lowland Peatlands held at Cisarua, Indonesia, 3-8 July 1992* (Gland, Switzerland: IUCN, 1996).

[10] One of the most comprehensive descriptions of the ancient material culture in the delta is Louis Malleret, *L'Archéologie du Delta du Mékong*. Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient (1959). See Volume 1, pp. 27-33, for an excellent discussion of ancient hydraulic infrastructure and pre-Angkor settlements near present-day Châu Đốc and the Vĩnh Tế Canal. George Çoedès also translated stone inscriptions and Chinese documents to suggest that this was the first "Indianized Kingdom" in Southeast

Material traces from this human culture include wooden piers, gold jewelry, Buddhist and Hindu statues, brick foundations and traces of major canals. The largest brick foundations lie at the Oc Eo site near Ba Thê Mountain in the Long Xuyên Quadrangle. An amateur French archaeologist surveying photographs of the region in 1931 discovered ancient canals crossing this region, stretching over 100 km from the coast to Angkor Borei in Cambodia.[11] This region is believed to have once been an important halfway point for sailing ships following the monsoon winds between India and China. As a possible warehousing center on the ancient canals, Oc Eo may have once supplied wood, rice and valuable forest products such as rhinoceros horn, elephants, feathers, aromatic woods, and wild spices. Chinese records from trade missions and accounts of Fu Nan monks visiting China note major settlements at Oc Eo/Ba Thê, Angkor Borei, and Đồng Tháp Mười. Inscriptions describe Indian merchant colonies in these places, too.

There is little textual or archaeological evidence of this type after 700 CE, suggesting that the population abandoned these sites in that era. From the 9th to 14th centuries, the delta was a coastal frontier of the Angkor Empire, a large kingdom with its capital located upstream on the Great Lake (Tonle Sap). One explanation for the demise of ancient settlements after 700 CE is the increase in coastal piracy. Bas reliefs at Angkor

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Asia and that elite members of the Court traveled around the Gulf of Thailand and to India and China. See George Çoedès, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, pp. 35-80.

[11] Pierre Paris, "Anciens Canaux Reconnus Sur Photographs Aeriénnes dans les Provinces de Tak Ev et de Châu Đốc," *Bulletin de l'École Française de l'Extrême-Orient* XXXI (1931), 221-223.

Thom and Chinese texts describe a strong sea presence of Java and Champa in the 12th and 13th centuries. In 1177, the Cham king Jaya Indravarman IV launched a devastating naval assault on Angkor, sailing a fleet through the Mekong Delta and then laying waste to the Angkor capital on the banks of Tonle Sap.[12] Such massive naval assaults as well as more common occurrences of piracy would have precluded the construction of extensive settlements or trading centers.

Events in the 17th century marked the beginning of a trend in Vietnamese population growth and settlement that continues to the present day. The migration of Vietnamese was linked to Chinese settlement of the Mekong Delta in the 1680's. Qing Dynasty reprisals against members of the old regime led to an exodus of Ming loyalists (*Minh hương*) by sea to different kingdoms in Southeast Asia. In 1679, 3000 Fukien troops visited the Nguyễn Court in Huế and gained asylum in the southern Vietnamese kingdom. The Nguyễn Lord sent them to the Cambodian frontier where they established commercial ports at Biên Hòa, Sài Gòn, and Mỹ Tho. [13] In 1681, another Chinese émigré, Mặc Cửu, immigrated to Cambodia and won a similar concession from the Cambodian king to develop a port at Hà Tiên in the Mekong Delta. From 1690 to

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[12] Coedès, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, 166.
[13] Nguyễn Ngọc Hiền, Ed, *Lê Thành Hầu: Nguyễn Hữu Cảnh: 1650-1700* (TP Hồ Chí Minh: NXB Văn Học, 1997), 78. *Đại Nam Thực Lục* Vol. I, 91.

1780, Hà Tiên flourished as a virtual city-state, trading forest products from Cambodia.[14]

The lower Mekong region, including much of Cambodia and the delta, emerged as an important frontier for both Vietnamese and Tai settlement and expansion.[15] Since Dậi Việt's defeat of Champa in 1471, the Vietnamese kingdom expanded its southern frontier into the area that is today the central Vietnamese coast. Similarly, the Tai kingdom of Ayutthaya expanded its frontier eastwards into the territory of the former Angkor empire, sacking the Angkor capital in 1431. These parallel Vietnamese and Tai expansions eventually met in Cambodia. The Cambodian court had relocated to the vicinity of present-day Phnom Penh, and a weakened monarchy split into rival factions allied with Vietnamese or Tai.

The Nguyễn Court used one such crisis in the Cambodian Court in 1732 to obtain further concessions for Vietnamese military and administrative posts in the Mekong Delta. This led to the establishment of garrisons at Mesar (Mỹ Tho), Kampong Reussey (Bến Trè), Koh Gong (Gò Cong) and Peam Ba-rach (Long Xuyên).[16] In 1757, Ang Tonn, an exiled heir to the Cambodian throne, ceded Phsar Dek (Sa Dec), Long Ho

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[14] Societe des Études Indo-chinoises. *Geographie Physique, Economique et Historique de la Cochinchine: Monographie de la Province d'Hà-Tiên.Fascicule II* (Saigon: Imprimerie L. Menard, 1901), 51.

[15] Tai here refers to Tai-speaking people who founded several kingdoms in the area of present-day Yunnan, Laos Cambodia and Thailand.

[16] Lê Qúy Đôn, *Phủ Biên Tạp Lục: Quyển 1,* Lê Xuân Giáo, ed. (Sài Gòn: Phủ Quốc Vụ Khanh Đặc Trách Văn Hoá, 1972), 108.

(Vĩnh Long), and Mot Chrouk (Châu Đốc) to the Nguyễn Court in return for Vietnamese support of his bid to recapture the throne.[17] By the 1780's, most of the Mekong Delta including part of present-day eastern Cambodia was occupied by Vietnamese troops and settlers, while much of the western region of Cambodia at Battambang and Angkor was ruled under the authority of Ayutthaya then the Kingdom of Siam.

The social landscape of the Mekong Delta in the mid-18th century was divided into loosely connected enclaves along waterways and in forests in the interior regions. The rivers had become a trading crossroads for Malay, Dutch, and Portuguese as well as the Chinese, Khmer and Vietnamese. The Vietnamese defeat of the last remaining Cham principality at Nha Trang in 1720 led to an exodus of Cham people to Cambodia, Siam and a river settlement near Châu Đốc on the present-day Việt Nam-Cambodia border. The Cham group that located in the Mekong Delta converted to Islam and through these religious ties maintained a special trading niche with insular Southeast Asia via Malay trading vessels. Vietnamese settlers and farmer-soldiers established garrisons, posts, and adjacent fields alongside both Chinese and Khmer settlements. The Vietnamese administrative center was located at Vĩnh Thành (today Vĩnh Long), a rich area of land located between the two major Mekong branches.

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[17] Sơn Nam, *Lịch Sử An Giang* (Long Xuyên: NXB An Giang, 1986), 3.

The largest political and economic center of the delta in the 18th century was centered around the ethnic-Chinese city-state at Hà Tiên. Since its founding in 1681, it had grown into a prosperous trading port, serving as a coastal trading center for local pepper plantations as well as the inland trade for ivory and aromatic woods from Cambodia. The ruling Mạc family also allowed different religious settlements including the first Catholic mission. Provocations between Hà Tiên and Siam eventually brought several military invasions and prolonged war to the delta region. In 1764, Taksin, the son of an ethnic-Chinese warlord and a Siamese woman, seized the Siamese throne after the city had been sacked by the Burmese. Hà Tiên harbored members of the former Siamese court including two fugitive princes. In 1768, while Taksin and his army fought against a rebellion in the Malay Peninsula, Hà Tiên's Governor Mạc Thiên Từ sent a fleet of war ships and several thousand troops to Chantabun to launch a siege on Bangkok.[18] The Siamese army repulsed the troops, and in retaliation Taksin sent an army and naval fleet to sack Hà Tiên three years later in 1771.[19] The Siamese troops chased Governor Từ inland to Mat Chrouk (Châu Đốc) where Vietnamese troops from the garrison there stopped the advance and then recovered the port in 1773.[20]

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[18] Chantaburi at this time was a similar type of Chinese-settled port on the Siamese coast, though it was settled by Tieou-chau Chinese who were rivals in the Chinese trade with Mạc Thiên Tư's Cantonese delegations in the Mekong Delta.

[19] Yumio Sakurai and Takako Kitigawa, "Ha Tien or Banteay Mas in the Time of the Fall of Ayutthaya," *From Japan to Arabia: Ayutthaya's Maritime Relations with Asia*, Kennon Breazeale, ed. (Bangkok: Foundation for the Promotion of Social Sciences and Humanities Textbooks Project, 1999), 180-181. Also see Nicholas Sellers, *The Princes of Hà-tiên, 1682-1867* (Bruxelles, Belgium: Thanh-Long, 1983), 55-68.

[20] *Gia Định Thành Thông Chí*, p. 126.

During this Siamese attack in the delta, a separate civil war erupted in the central mountains of the Vietnamese kingdom near Bình Định. Three brothers led a rebel army called the Tây Sơn (Western Mountains) against the Nguyễn troops. By 1774, they had chased the Nguyễn Lord, Nguyễn Phúc Thuận, and his advisors and family to the fort at Gia Định (present-day Hồ Chí Minh City). Thuận died there during a siege in 1777 and left his teenage son, Nguyễn Phức Ánh, as the only heir.[21] Nguyễn Ánh and a few members of the royal family fled to the Mekong Delta. Upon reaching Vietnamese camps near Châu Đốc and Hà Tiên, the young prince met Pigneau de Behaine, chief of Catholic missions in India and Indochina. Pigneau and an assembly of agents and guards briefly harboured the teenage heir on the island of Hòn Đất while a Nguyễn general, Đỗ Thành Nhơn, reorganized Nguyễn supporters into a Đông Sơn (Eastern Mountain) force. After three years of fighting, the Đông Sơn army recovered control of the delta and the Gia Định citadel in 1780. At Gia Định, Nguyễn Ánh assumed the title of prince [*vương*] at age 18.[22]

Tay Son forces laid siege to Gia Định in 1783 and again defeated the Nguyễn. Nguyễn Ánh then fled to Phú Quốc Island.[23] He and his troops received asylum in Bangkok by the new Siamese king Cakri (Rama I) who had ousted King Taksin. Rama I negotiated with the Nguyễn before the fall of Gia Định in 1783 and received the Nguyễn along

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[21] Sellers, *Princes of Hà Tiên*, 74.
[22] Phan Đại Đoãn, *Khởi Nghĩa Diệt Nguyễn và Chống Xiêm* [The Rebellion to Kill the Nguyen and Resist Siam] (Bình Định: Sở Văn Hoá Thông Tin Bình Định, 1993), 169. See also Frederic Mantienne, *Mgr Pierre Pigneaux: Évoque d'Adran, Dignitaire de Cochinchine* (Paris: Églises d'Asie, 1999), 77.
[23] *Gia Định Thành Thông Chí*, pp. 127-135.

with French supporters at the coastal town of Chantaburi.[24] A year later, Rama I sent an army of troops and a naval fleet with the Nguyễn to retake the delta. After suffering another Tây Sơn defeat the Nguyễn returned to Siam again. In 1787, Nguyễn forces finally returned by way of Phú Quốc Island and then marched to Gia Định. From 1787, they began building garrisons and granaries in the Mekong Delta to support a long campaign to fight the Tây Sơn. These wars continued for fifteen more years until the Nguyễn finally captured Hà Nội in 1802. Nguyễn Ánh then took the ruling title Gia Long and founded the Nguyễn Dynasty with a new Court located at Huế. He designated one of his most popular officials, Lê Văn Duyệt, as a viceroy in charge of administering the frontier territories in the delta region. Unlike the rest of Việt Nam the southern region was organized into five military provinces (trấn) with Duyệt's government located in a large stone fortress near present-day Chợ Lớn.

The resulting political situation in the delta by 1802 was one where stability depended on a loosely autonomous and multi-ethnic coalition loyal to the Nguyễn Emperor. One of Gia Long's closest allies, Lê Văn Duyệt, ruled the southern provinces from the citadel at Gia Định (Sài Gòn). Khmer and especially Chinese forces rallied behind the Nguyễn after Tây Sơn troops ransacked markets at Sài Gòn, Chợ Lớn, Mỹ Tho and Cù Lao Phô.[25] After 1787, a Khmer general from Trà Ôn and a Cham general from Châu

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[24] Phan Đại Đoãn, *Khởi Nghĩa Diệt Nguyễn*, 195.
[25] Sơn Nam, *Lịch Sử Khẩn Hoang Miền Nam* [History of Settlement in the South] (Hồ CHÍ MINH CITY: NXB Văn Nghệ, 1994), 49.

Giang led recruits to join the Nguyễn, also. After Nguyễn Ánh's ascension as Emperor, these areas enjoyed relative autonomy.

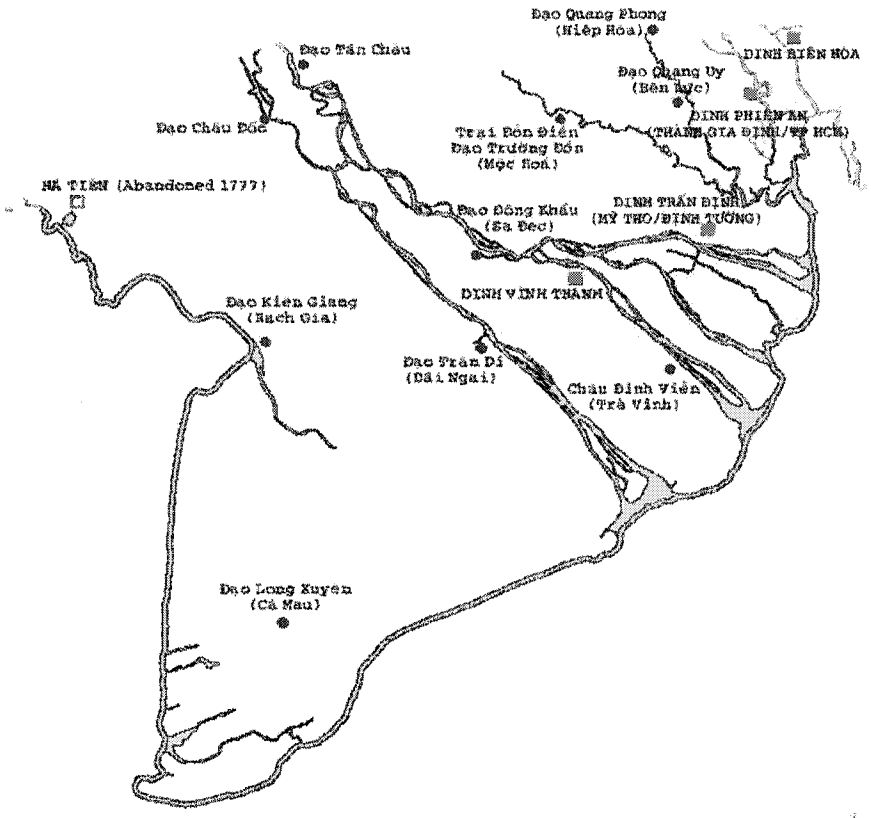


Figure 1.2: Nguyễn Administrative Barracks (*dinh*) and Forts (đạo) in 1790. This map indicates the location of the primary Nguyễn administrative centers in the delta. The former barracks at Hà Tiên had been abandoned and was later rebuilt. Source: Author map.

The Nguyễn military campaigns from 1787 to 1802 resulted in the establishment of a larger infrastructure of government barracks, rice granaries, and garrisons in the delta. After re-establishing a base at Già Định in 1788, Nguyễn Ánh ordered construction of rice granaries (*kho*) at administrative barracks in four of the five military cantons (trấn):

Phiên An, Biên Hoà, Vĩnh Thành (Vĩnh Long) and Định Tường (Mỹ Tho - Đồng Tháp).[26] In 1789, he delegated twelve of his top officials to administer these government centers (*dinh*). Those persons who didn't farm or contribute to the granaries were immediately drafted into the army.[27] The Khmer *srok* (provinces) at Gò Công, Sa Đec and Sóc Trang contributed rice and military recruits, but they were allowed to continue local administration by allied Khmer officials. In 1791, Nguyễn Ánh expanded his government's presence into the far southern regions of the delta, ordering regiments of ethnic Chinese (Hoa Kiều) troops and settlers to build a new fort at Long Xuyên. Each station held 25 to 35 troops and their families.[28]

Emperor Gia Long continued similar policies to encourage Vietnamese settlement in the region after 1802. He ordered officials at government centers (*dinh*) to cede non-cleared land to settlers who were too poor to buy good agricultural land. Those settlers who accepted the grant and failed to clear it were fined 3 *hộc* of paddy and required to join the military to repay the debt with labor.[29] He also continued a settlement policy for prisoners, a traditional custom. They arrived in fetters and chains, and a local official allotted a portion of land to the prisoner along with seed and tools. For each

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[26] *Gia Định Thành Thông Chí*, 135 [Book III, 79a]. With the exception of two children, grandsons of Mạc Thiên Từ, the entire Mạc family had been tortured and executed in Bangkok in 1780. Nguyễn Ánh ordered that these two be re-installed as governors of Hà Tiên in 1799.
[27] Nguyễn Đình Đầu, *Chế Độ Công Điền Công Thổ Trong Lịch Sử Khẩn Hoang Lập Ấp ở Nam Kỳ Lục Tỉnh* [Land Tenure Systems in the History of Settlement of Cochinchina] (Hà Nội: Hội Sử Học Việt Nam, 1992), 58-59. Historical sources from this time typically refer to Khmer provinces as *sóc* and Khmer provincial governors as *óc nha*.
[28] *Đại Nam Thực Lục: Quốc Sử Quán Triều Nguyễn Tập II* (Hà Nội: NXB Sử Học, 1963), 133.
[29] *ĐNTL: Tập III* (Hà Nội: NXB Sử Học, 1963), 9.

month of work, he received 1 *phương* (25 kg) of rice. After a year, if he cleared the land and successfully planted rice, then the local official had the fetters released. After three years, if the prisoner successfully converted the entire area of land to rice field, he was free and his chains were broken. His period of chain labor could be shortened if his wife and family joined and together they cleared the land more quickly.[30]

Building Local Vietnamese Spaces

When new migrants arrived to clear land and build their homes, they did not clearly reproduce the bamboo hedgerow and home that they had left behind in the north. Instead they often incorporated local Khmer or Chinese elements that were oriented to the local terrain. In terms of their cosmic orientation to the land, many Vietnamese and Chinese settlers adopted the "Lady of the Land" or Bà Chúa Xứ as a local protective deity worshipped by Khmers.[31] In a corner of the home or the garden, they built a small shrine in her honor. Especially women made offerings of honey and prayed for prosperity and good health.[32] Perhaps as a public gesture intended to ease tensions

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[30] *ĐNTL: Tập III,* 329.

[31] Venerating "saint ladies" occurred at the local and state levels in the former Cham and Khmer regions. King Gia Long and Minh Mạng paid tribute to the Cham deity, Thiên-Y-A-Na (a term derived from the sanskrit devaraja) – building temples to her, and offering her royal titles for her benevolence. Nguyễn Thế Anh suggests that such actions represent an attempt to legitimize Vietnamese rule by formally recognizing locally popular deities and giving them official status within the bureaucracy. Nguyễn Thế Ánh, "The Vietnamization of the Cham Deity Po Nagar," *Essays into Vietnamese Pasts*, K.W. Taylor and John K. Whitemore, ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University SEAP, 1995), 49.

[32] Nguyễn Công Bình, Lê Xuân Diệm and Mạc Đường, eds., *Văn Hoá và Cư Dân Đồng Bằng Sông Cửu Long* [Culture and Inhabitants of the Mekong Delta] (Hồ CHÍ MINH CITY: NXB Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1990), 377. Besides Bà Chúa Xứ, local farmers also erected shrines to the Khmer male god Neak Ta,

between the royal government and the Khmer community, regional leaders sometimes dedicated large, state temples to such deities. In 1820, for example, as work on the controversial Vĩnh Tế Canal increased tensions between Vietnamese troops and Khmer conscripts, the governor's wife dedicated a temple to Bà Chúa Xứ on the banks of a canal spanning the Khmer frontier.[33]

In orienting their homes, fields and other buildings, Vietnamese settlers generally imported their own form of *feng-shui* (*phong thủy*) as commonly practiced in Vietnam and China. The directional orientation of roof beams, the dimensions of doors, and the side of the house facing a road or a waterway were either auspicious or not depending on supposed harmonic combinations of distance and direction. Auspicious locations and directions were tied to perceived invisible force lines or "dragon lines" (*long mạch*) related to the circulatory life forces of air and water moving through the earth. They corresponded roughly to "tigers" representing the lines of hills and mountains and "dragons" representing the flow of rivers and creeks.[34] These principal surface features

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called Ông Tà in the corner of a field or garden. This tutelary spirit protected a household or field from evil. Shrines for this spirit were typically constructed out of brick or stone and can still be seen in gardens and fields in the delta today. Bà Chúa Xứ was associated with honey and the queen bee (*ong chúa*) because this represented a nexus of fertility, health, and prosperity.

[33] The origins of the stone linga, statues and steles commemorated in 1820 remain somewhat mysterious. In 1943, the French archaeologist Malleret visited the temple of Bà Chúa Xứ and neighboring sites. They found at the Tây An Pagoda a statue that was originally a Sivaite statue, and at Miếu Bà Chúa Xứ, they discovered that the statue of Bà Chúa Xứ was originally a Visnu statue. Stone inscriptions in Sanskrit described a local prince's coronation in 1058 CE, suggesting that the relics may have once been part of a small local temple complex. Malleret, *L'Archéologie du Delta du Mekong*, 35-37.

[34] The term "Nine Dragons" (Cửu Long) is still commonly used to describe the Mekong Delta in Vietnamese because of its many branches. Similarly, the port of Kowloon also means "Nine Dragons" for the rows of mountain ridges descending there into the sea. Where two creeks merged, farmers called the triangular land the "dragon's jaw" (hàm rồng).

were also intimately linked to a detailed demarcation of space and time following the Chinese/Vietnamese lunisolar calendar. The calendar was divided into a cycle of 12 animal years and 10 elements. A full cycle was 60 years and called a *hội*—roughly a full human lifetime. Months within the year were also sub-divided into shorter *hội* cycles of days, hours, and minutes. Việtnamese astrology fixed a person's destiny to his location in this system of time (year/date/hour/minute) and space. Likewise, auspicious times for marriages, new construction, harvesting, etc. were generally coordinated with the calendar.

When they moved to the Mekong Delta, Vietnamese settlers imported rice and livestock species; but they also incorporated Khmer practices in their farming. They used Khmer tools and work animals to deal with the marshy soils and unfamiliar grasses, adopting the local practice of "cutting grass" (*phát cỏ*) instead of plowing. If cut just before the onset of annual floods, then the pooling of water effectively suffocated the roots. Typical species of wild grasses here included *lác* [*Cyperus digitatus*, a brown sedge 1.3m high] and *năn* [*Eleocharis*, a "needle grass" that grows 1m high]. A Khmer tool called *cây phãng* was used for this purpose. This tool was roughly the same size as a machete except that at 80 cm from the handle, the blade curved 90 degrees. The sharp edge of the blade ran on the inside. Grass cutters held it in one hand and used it in conjunction with a small sickle in the other.[35] Working with the *phãng* was labor-

[35] See Sơn Nam, *Lịch Sử Khẩn Hoang Miền Nam*, 62. Sơn Nam notes that Trịnh Hoài Đức does not write directly about the tools used but does describe this land as different from *grass land* (*thảo điền*). Grass-

intensive, with the tool weighing just over 3 kilograms. Typically, local strongmen rented out their service, swinging the *phãng* in one hand and the sickle in the other. During Tự Đức's reign (late 1850's), one legendary grass-cutter named Cai Thoại hired himself to settlements and was reputed to work as fast as 7 men.[36] Once the grass was cleared, they then employed more familiar tools such as field rakes (Figure 1.3).

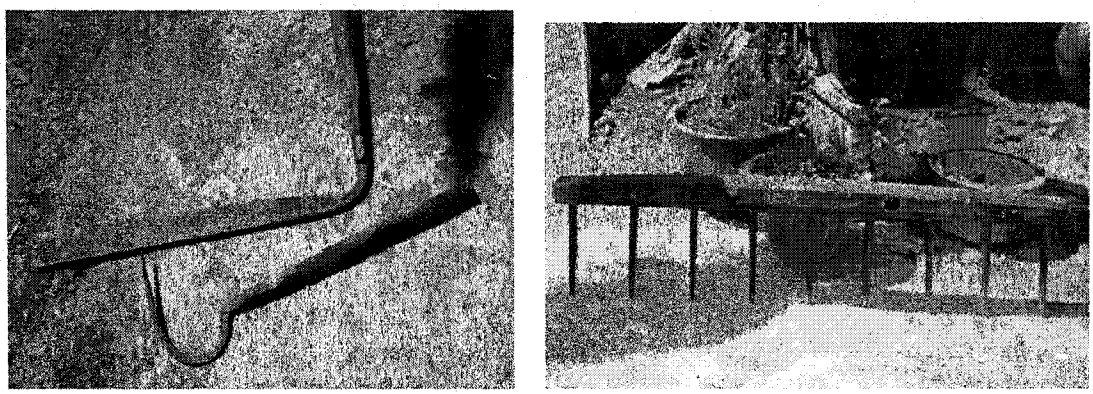


Figure 1.3: Field Tools. (Left) Grass-cutting tool and a variety of sickle. (Right) Field rake (*cây bùa*) used after cutting to smooth the layer of silt in the field and allow even water coverage during flooding to kill grass stubble and prevent oxidation of the soil. Source: Author Pictures. Tools from both pictures are dated to the mid-19th century and are part of the private collection of Thấy Trường Ngọc Tường, Cai Lậy, Mỹ Tho.

This unusual form of land eventually merited an entirely separate classification in written sources as "marsh fields" (*trạch điền*). Vietnamese land records typically divided agricultural land into classes of upland fields (*sơn điền*) or lowland fields (*thảo*

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cutting was commonly practiced until 1945; after then, especially after 1975, continuous rice cropping cycles prevented regeneration of grasses in fields.

[36] Sơn Nam, *Cá Tính Miền Nam* [Personality of the South] (HỒ CHÍ MINH CITY: NXB Trẻ, 1997), 21.

điền). "Marsh fields" did not require plowing as was common in the north and central regions because of the year-round abundance of water. The comparable productivity between lowland fields (*thảo điền*) and "marsh fields" was also significant; one *hộc* (10 liters) of seed yielded 100 *hộc of paddy* in lowland fields compared with 300 *hộc* in "marshy fields".[37]

Vietnamese settlers introduced short-stem rice strains from the north and also adopted local ones developed by the Khmer.[38] The two primary families of rice growing in the delta at this time were short-stem rice (*Oryza sativa*) and floating rice (*Oryza rufipogon*). Floating rice does not actually float; because it's stem grows rapidly up to 4 meters, it can quickly respond to floods and keep rice kernels above the flood's surface. Khmer farmers favored this long-stem rice.[39] Vietnamese settlers favored higher-yielding, short-stem varieties; they grew both non-glutinous (*lúa tẻ*) and glutinous (*lúa nếp*). Over time, they developed hundreds of strains differentiated by adaptability, length of growing season, taste, color, size, etc. According to *GDTTC*, the most prized varieties were Chinese strains (*lúa tào*).[40] In 1900, a French researcher counted 511 types of rice in the delta, including 16 types of floating rice. Names for rice strains

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[37] *GĐTTC*, 155.
[38] Trần Xuân Kiêm, *Nghề Nông Nam Bộ* [Agriculture in the South] (Hà Nội: NXB Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1992), 53.
[39] It generally only grows wild now in a few locations.
[40] *GĐTTC*, p. 154.

varied with local language, customs, etc. They might refer to poetic, religious, or practical details such as "White Phoenix", "Bird's Claw", or "Sugar Girl".[41]

The tools used to harvest depended on the rice strains used. For short-stem rice, farmers used a short-handled sickle. Longer stem varieties, such as floating rice required use of a small blade attached to a longer and curved wooden handle used to gathering the longer stems. Handles were typically fashioned from one resinous tree called *cây mù u* (*Callophyllum inophyllum*).[42] (Figure 1.4) Chinese trade also played an important role in settlement as merchants sold iron implements and bought rice for currency imported from the north. Vietnamese settlers also adopted wild native plants into their diets and bought Khmer oxen and water buffalo that could better tolerate the boggy soils.

[41] Trần Xuân Kiêm, p. 54.

[42] This tree grows in tropical peat swamps and highly acidic terrains throughout tropical Southeast Asia, especially in lowland coastal areas. Recent investigations by the Forest Department of Sarawak and the Arnold Arboretum at Harvard have revealed that compounds derived from the latex sap of this tree may be useful in fighting HIV.



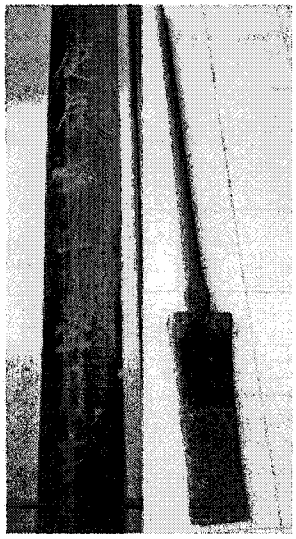


Figure 1.4: Tools used in the Mekong Delta (Left) This long sickle was used for harvesting the long-stem or "floating" rice more commonly consumed in Khmer communities. A Vietnamese sickle used for cutting short-stem rice would typically include a handle extending just above the curved blade pictured above. (Right) This tool was used for cutting into clay to create ditches and canals. The iron tip was most likely imported from China, and the Chinese inscription on the wooden handle notes the year of manufacture as Canh Thin (1880). Sources: Author Photos. (Left) Collection of Hoà An Research Station, Cần Thơ University. (Right) Collection of Thầy Trường Ngọc Tường, Cai Lậy.

During this era of Vietnamese settlement in 18th and 19th centuries, rice cultivation became intimately linked to profound social and demographic changes affecting the region. It was an important component of the Nguyễn campaign against the Tây Sơn after 1790.[43] Rice shortages, especially in the northern regions of Việt Nam also brought on famines and local rebellions. The Nguyễn Court often relied on exports from the Mekong Delta to stave off famines and civil unrest in the north. During one such famine in 1803, Emperor Gia Long sent 35,000 *phương* (25 kg) to Nghệ An and

[43] Li Tana, *Nguyễn Cochinchina: Southern Việtnam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1998), 158. Population records in the 19th century are too vague to venture beyond rough estimates of population change in the delta, but Li Tana makes a strong case for the role of warfare and famine in driving people south.

5,000 *phương* to Quảng Nam.[44] Rice shortages combined with the availability of open land in the Mekong Delta drove thousands of new settlers southward each year.

Vietnamese Public Works and Commemorative Spaces

While *Writings on Gia Định* may have only reached a small audience of literate readers after 1820, a series of major public works projects in the Mekong Delta involved thousands and led to a more permanent reorganization of the delta landscape. One project in particular, the Vĩnh Tế Canal (1819-1824) now occupies almost legendary status, as local historians trace the origins of Vietnamese jurisdiction in the region to this project.[45] Vĩnh Tế Canal and other canal projects represented an intensification of investment, labor and force; and like the French after them, the Nguyễn Court was quick to commemorate these accomplishments in official histories and with local steles and monuments. These acts of physical construction and commemoration combined with the reinterpretation of these events in new texts represented the beginnings of a new state vision in the region.

The first of the three canal projects, Bảo Định, involved widening an existing waterway first dug in 1705. The original channel served Nguyễn aims in 1705 to quickly transport troops to the Chinese port at Mỹ Tho. The Nguyễn commander at the time,

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[44] *Đại Nam Thực Lục*, Tập III, 141-142.
[45] In September 1999, the An Giang People's Committee convened a short history conference on the topic of the Vĩnh Tế Canal.

Vân Trường, directed his army of conscripts to dig a canal 21 kilometers (47 dặm) from Vam Cò Tây River at Tân An to a creek (*rạch*) called Bảo Định that emptied into the Mekong at Mỹ Tho. Later, local governors ordered their work crews to deepen and widen the canal to allow larger ships to pass. They also built a "mandarin road" (*quan đường*) for official communication along one of the canal's banks. Three decades of warfare with Siam and the Tây Sơn, however, severely damaged the canal until its renovation in 1819. The governor of Định Tường province (*trấn*) raised a force of 9,679 laborers who each received 1 *quan* (a wooden rack of zinc coins) and 1 phương (25 kg) in rice. The project lasted 4 months during the dry season from January to April, 1819.[46] After completing the work, Gia Long ordered a stone stele to be constructed alongside the canal, commemorating the work.

[46] *GĐTTC*, p. 45-46.



Figure 1.5: 1819 Bảo Định Canal Commemorative Stele This stele is today housed within a small, local memorial alongside the canal at Phú Kiệt Hamlet, Chờ Gậo District, Mỹ Tho Province. Source: Author photo. December 2001.

The other two canals, Thoại Hà and Vĩnh Tế, were riskier attempts to assert tighter control over the frontier with Cambodia. Since 1806, Gia Long and his generals had been engaged in a series of conflicts with Siam over Cambodia. Although Gia Long had once enjoyed good relations with Rama I during his asylum in Bangkok in 1787, relations between the two rulers soured over the Cambodian king's successor in 1806. The relatively pro-Siamese King Ang Eng had died and left his son Ang Chan on the throne. Because of a personal dispute with Rama I, King Chan invited greater

Vietnamese protection at the Court. He further angered the Siamese court by refusing to attend the funeral for Rama I in 1809 and then refusing to send troops to support Siamese campaigns against Burma from 1809-1811.[47] Rama II sent a small army of expeditionary forces to overthrow King Chan, and in return Chan asked Gia Long for military protection.

Gia Long sent one of his most talented generals, Nguyễn Văn Thoại, to Phnom Penh. Thoại established the La Bích Barracks (*dinh*) and stationed 500 troops at this garrison located near the Cambodian palace. Thoại's troops pushed back the Siamese forces, and afterwards he declared the region as a military province called Trấn Tây. Thoại served as resident of the Trấn Tây protectorate until 1816.[48] He then left La Bích to take the post of governor at the largest royal barracks in the delta at Vĩnh Thành (Vĩnh Long). It was from here that Thoại led several projects to fortify the delta against a feared Siamese invasion. Each of the two canals involved cutting a passageway from the lower branch of the Mekong to the gulf coast.[49] In the 1700's, Hà Tiên had suffered three major naval attacks from the Siamese, so Thoại and his planners attempted to dig two waterways that would connect larger river fortresses at Vĩnh Thành and Châu Đốc with a fort at Rạch Giá and the old city of Hà Tiên on the coast.

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[47] David P. Chandler, *A History of Cambodia* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), 119.
[48] *GĐTTC*, p. 84 For a well-documented biography of Nguyễn Văn Thoại see Nguyễn Văn Hầu, *Thoại Ngọc Hầu và Những Cuộc Khai Phá Miền Hậu Giang* [Thoại Ngọc Hầu and the Settlement of the Hậu Giang Region] (Sài Gòn: Hoa Sen, 1972).
[49] Nguyễn Văn Hầu, *Thoại Ngọc Hầu,* 159.

In 1817, approximately 1500 soldiers widened the channel of Tam Khê Creek from the river town of Long Xuyên over 40 km towards the coastal fort, Rạch Giá. Given the speed of this project—3 months—and archaeological evidence showing many ancient canals in the vicinity, it is likely that this canal was also a rehabilitation of an existing channel. The project was immediately viable, allowing larger ships to quickly pass from the river to the sea coast.[50]

In 1821, the new Nguyễn emperor, Minh Mạng, ordered a stele be carved to commemorate the accomplishment. He officially renamed the canal "Thoại River" (*Thoại Hà*) and he renamed a mountain bordering the canal "Thoại Mountain" (*Núi Thoại*). He elevated Thoại two degrees in the mandarinate and gave him the official title Thoại Ngọc Hầu which translated roughly as "Jade Marquis Thoại". A stone carver at the citadel in Châu Đốc carved Thoại's own history of the project. As with Trịnh Hoài Đức's *Writings on Gia Định*, the inscriptions conveyed a perspective on the land and such projects heavily influenced by classical Chinese concepts:

> The mountain has existed since the days of the division between Heaven and Earth. It has now received its true name with this royal order. Since that moment, the vegetation has flourished and the clouds and mist appear in bright colors. The summit, compared with ordinary mountains or hills, is not far from the celestial vault. Since antiquity, this territory to which it belongs has been under the domination of barbarians who called it Núi Sập. Since the time of the [Vietnamese] conquest of the South by

[50]Trần Nguyện Hành, "Les Inscriptions de Thoại Sơn et de Vĩnh Tế," Premier Congress International des Etudes Extrêmes Orientales, Hà Nội, 1903. Library of the Institute of Social Sciences, Ho Chi Minh City. See also Nguyễn Văn Hầu, *Thoại Ngọc Hầu*, 167-179.

> the armies of the [Nguyễn] Lord, this mountain has been described on the maps as a garden paradise. The woods were thick and the fields covered in grass, used for resting by troops of leaping deers and stags. I required one month to complete this project, and the channel that now exists is similar to a river, facilitating constant circulation.[51]

Despite differences in language, the meaning of this inscription conveyed the same interpretations of the state's role in such projects as later colonial and post-colonial dedications: turning wilderness into civilization. While the terms of what constituted "civilized" and what constituted "wild" or "barbaric" differed from the Nguyễn mandarins to colonial bureaucrats and more recent officials, the basic idea expressed was the same. The process of writing official histories and carving stone inscriptions, then, was intimately tied to the physical process of carving new waterways through the swampy, forested frontiers of former Khmer territories.

The largest of the three projects, Vĩnh Tế Canal, was perhaps the single most contested water project at the time; and here there is sufficient historical documentation both by Khmers and Vietnamese to show two opposing historical views of it. While hailed by Vietnamese historians as an important protective work, Khmer writers viewed it instead

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[51] Trần Nguyện Hành, "Les Inscriptions ... ," 7-9. Hành translated the original inscriptions from Chinese to French: "L'existence de la montagne remonte depuis les anciens temps de la division du Ciel et de la Terre. Elle recu son veritable nom lors que parvint l'ordre royal. Depuis cette époque, la vegetation a toujours été florissante, et les nuages et la vapeur ont toujours apparu sous de riantes couleurs. Le sommet, compare à celui des autres montagnes ordinaires, ou elevations de terre, n'est pas très éloigné de la voute [sic] céleste. Dès l'antiquité le territoire auquel elle appartient était sous la domination des barbares, qui l'appelèrent Núi Sập. Lors de la conquête de la region du Sud par les armies conquérantes du Précèdent Saint cette montagne fut indiqué sur la carte et cette époque, ce était un veritable Eden, les bois étaient épais et touffes, et les champs était couverts en herbes, et servaient de retraite a dès troupaux bondissants de biches et de cerfs...Je employai un mois entire pour achever cette oeuvre, et le canal existe aujourdhui semblable à une rivière qui facilite la navigation perpetuelle."

as a terrible abuse of Khmer workers that led to a series of rebellions against the Vietnamese in 1821. The project began after Vietnamese troops escorted the Cambodian King Chan to Gia Định for a meeting with Gia Long where he agreed to provide several thousand Khmer laborers to work on the project linking Châu Đốc with Hà Tiên. The waterway stretched 91 kilometers and was to effectively cut off Khmer movements into the interior east of the canal.[52] The canal bisected a winding creek called Vam Nao Ca Âm, creating a depressed area where water pooled throughout most of the year. This section, some 8 kilometers long, was once covered with lotus ponds and teemed with fish.[53]

Thoại ordered his ethnic-Khmer generals and foremen to direct the Khmer laborers in this swampy area near several of their villages. Work crews were divided according to the terrain and their ethnic group. Ethnic Chinese dug the hardened soil and rock from vicinity of Hà Tiên. Khmer crews worked in the swampy mid section; and Vietnamese crews dug inward from the citadel at Châu Đốc.[54] In the first two dry seasons of 1819 and 1820, cholera and dysentery swept through the project sites brought on by shortages of potable water. Several thousand Vietnamese, Chinese and Khmer workers died during the five years of the canal's construction. A total of approximately 50,000 persons, roughly half of them Khmer, were required for the project. Severe droughts in

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[52] Societe des Etudes Indo-Chinoises. *Géogaphie Physique, Economique et Historique de la Cochinchine: 2nd Installment: Monographie de la Province d'Ha-Ti'n.* Saigon: Imprimerie L. Ménard (1901), pp. 10-11. See also Nguyễn Văn Hầu, *Thoại Ngộc Hầu*, 183.
[53] *GĐTTC*, p. 59. (Book II, 67a)
[54] Ibid.

1822 brought the project to a halt after almost all of the laborers fled.[55] Some 25,000 persons worked for two dry seasons in 1823 and 1824 before completing the project.[56] Emperor Minh Mạng commissioned another set of steles and conferred the name Vĩnh Tế River to the project in honor of Thoại's wife Châu Thị Tế. The emperor elevated Thoại once again in rank and duties as Governor-Protector of Cambodia at Phnom Penh where he lived until his death in 1828.

Khmer sources described the same project quite differently. The Prey Kuk monastery chronicle states that working conditions for Khmers on the canal project sparked a major rebellion at Ba Phnom, a nearby mountain settlement once important as an administrative center. The *Robar Khsat Srok Khmer* described a rebellion of thousands of Khmer workers on the project in 1821 as a result of famines, droughts, and poor working conditions. Vietnamese authorities at the La Bích citadel outside Phnom Penh refused to exempt tributary shipments of rice to Vietnam during the famine, and this worsened local Khmer feelings towards the Nguyễn Court.[57] However, it was most likely the outbreak of cholera and dysentery in 1820 that triggered the uprising on the canal project. A Buddhist monk named Kai led the rebellion. The rebels quickly overran the mixed Vietnamese - Khmer regiment because Khmer soldiers refused to fire on the rebels. Lê Văn Duyệt then sent in Vietnamese troops from the Gia Định Citadel

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[55] Nguyễn Văn Hầu, *Thoại Ngọc Hầu*, 193.
[56] Nguyễn Văn Hầu, *Thoại Ngọc Hầu*, 211.
[57] Khin Sok, *Le Cambodge Entre le Siam et le Viêtnam (de 1775 à 1860)* (Paris: Ecole Francaise d'Extrême-Orient, 1991), 77.

who defeated the rebels at Kompong Cham.[58] The rebellion effectively ended the Nguyễn Court's policy of toleration for Khmer self-rule in the delta. The new emperor ordered his generals to execute all of King Chan's mandarins in retribution for the uprising.[59] In this more violent fashion, the Vĩnh Tế Canal functioned as an important end to a long period of relative autonomy between Vietnamese, Khmer and Chinese communities in the Mekong Delta.

The historical view of Vĩnh Tế as a "successful" project was also reduced by the events that followed its completion beginning in 1832.[60] In that year, the Viceroy Lê Văn Duyệt passed away and designated his adopted son Khôi as heir. Emperor Minh Mạng refused to recognize this succession and instead decided to use the opportunity to finally reorganize the system of military cantons (*trấn*) into six regular provinces (*tỉnh*). He appointed all new governors and dismissed Duyệt's former administration. Khôi then led a rebellion and allied himself with a new, adventurous Siamese king (Rama III). Khôi's forces quickly seized the citadels and briefly controlled the region. After three years of warfare with the Nguyễn armies, granaries, citadels, roads and canals were again left in ruins. The Siamese king, Rama III (1824-1851), used the opportunity to launch an offensive against the Nguyễn Court in an effort to gain control over territory

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[58] David Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 120.
[59] Khin Sok, *Le Cambodge*, 77.
[60] For a more detailed discussion of Vĩnh Tế Canal and its role in subsequent narratives of "progress" and "decline" in Vietnamese history, see David Biggs, "Problematic Progress: Reading Environmental and Social Change in the Mekong Delta," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 34, No. 1 (February 2003), 86.

in Cambodia, Laos and the Mekong Delta. He sent a fleet of ships to Hà Tiên and 5 battalions of troops and elephants to at Nghệ An.[61]

Vĩnh Tế Canal and Thoại Hà permitted the Siamese fleet with an easy entrance into the region. The ships traveled up the canal and with Khôi's rebels took over the citadel at Châu Đốc. Siamese troops camped out along the banks of the canals and for nearly two years controlled the lower portion of the delta with Khôi's troops. Khôi's rebels raided granaries and treasuries at Vĩnh Thành (Vĩnh Long), and many villages burned during the fighting.[62] After a prolonged siege that left the Gia Định citadel in ruins, Nguyễn forces finally recaptured the former palace.[63] Khôi died from illness during the same year; and by 1836, Nguyễn forces pushed the Siamese out of the Vĩnh Tế region.

The vulnerability of these new canals to invasion probably explains their relative abandonment after 1836. Ming Mạng was engaged in a much broader process of political consolidation over the entire Vietnamese kingdom from north to south. The southern rebellion had cut rice shipments to starving areas in northern provinces. Crowds came begging at provincial offices, and many people died along the roads.[64] The rice shortages also triggered local uprisings. After putting these various rebellions,

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[61] Sơn Nam, *Lịch Sử An Giang*, 9. See *Minh Mệnh Chính Yếu: Tập III Quyên 21* (Huế: NXB Thuận Hoà, 1994), 152.
[62] Sơn Nam, *Lịch Sử Khẩn Hoang Miền Nam*, p. 83.
[63] Ibid., 171.
[64] *Minh Mệnh Chính Yếu: Quốc Sử Quán Triều Nguyễn I* (Quyên VII) (Huế: NXB Thuận Hoà, 1994), 295. Hereafter referred to as *MMCY*.

Minh Mạng pushed for a more intensive cultivation of land—urging farmers to use "every morsel of earth".[65] He shifted his attentions away from building new fortresses or canals and instead attempted to bring profound reforms to traditional systems of tax collection and land management. Since 1805, Việt Nam was divided into 30 military provinces (*trấn*) and one prefecture (*phố*) for the royal capital at Huế.[66] After 1836, he converted this administrative system to the more familiar and traditional system of civilian provinces administered by a scholarly rather than military officials.

In the 2nd lunar month of 1836, Minister of War Trương Đăng Quê and Minister of Finance Nguyễn Kim Bảng departed Huế for Gia Định to commence the first property survey of the Mekong Delta. Trương Minh Giảng, the Governor-General of the Cambodian protectorate, replaced Bảng who died just after reaching Gia Định. Commencing such listings of property and owners was an important component of integrating the delta region into a more traditional form of the Vietnamese state. A land surveyor (đạc điền quan) classified property in the presence of the landowner, village leaders, and a district mandarin (a legal representative of the king). In five months, the first cadastral survey (*địa bộ*) was complete.[67] In the course of the survey, Minister Quê noted various kinds of discrepancies between listings of property use and observation. Parcels were sometimes subdivided into smaller units, with farmers on the smaller plots

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[65] *MMCY, I* (Quyên 7), 307.
[66] *GĐTTC*, 80.
[67] Nguyễn Đình Đầu, "Remarques Préliminaires sur le Registres Cadastraux (địa bạ) des Six Provinces de la Cochinchine (Nam Kỳ Lục Tỉnh)," *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient* LXXVIII (1991), 278.

responsible to the owner of the larger area. Other parcels were under-represented—some stretched a half-day's march beyond documented boundaries. Lands were also misclassified; for example, houses and orchards occupied land designated as rice paddy.[68]

The cadastral survey of the Mekong Delta was also not wholly a state project but one built from collaborations with local villages. Villages supported the surveying effort by supplying extra labor, food for the visiting survey teams, and lodging. Communal councils paid all expenses incurred within the village's lands. Local soldiers and officials from the village accompanied the survey crew to each landowner's plot to assist in measurement and classification. What surveyors saw, and perhaps how they reported it in the register depended on these cooperative ventures.[69] The total area of parcels surveyed in 1836 amounted to 630,076 *mẫu* or about 308,385 hectares.[70] This is less than 1/10th of the total land area in the Vietnamese delta. Most documented holdings were located on alluvial banks of major rivers and creeks in the freshwater alluvial zones. Land was re-defined in units of area and length as well as in classifications of ownership and tax liability such as "mandarin field" (*quan điền*), "communal field" (*công điền*), "private field" (*tư điền*), "military field" (*đốn điền*),

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[68] Ibid.
[69] Nguyễn Đình Đầu, *Tổng Kết Nghiên Cứu Địa Bộ Nam Kỳ Lục Tỉnh* (Hồ Chí Minh City: NXB Hồ Chí Minh City & Toyota Foundation (1994), 327.
[70] Ibid., 328.

"monastic land" (*Phật tư thổ*), "pepper land" (*tiêu viên thổ*), "cemetery"(*thổ mộ*), and "fallow land, wilderness"(*hoang nhàn thổ*).[71]

The land registers (*địa bộ*) thus connected the Vietnamese state to individual landowners, villages, and parcels of land in new ways. These lists became an important instrument for mediation between landowners and representatives of the kingdom; they continued the systematic consolidation of all lands into one common domain of land classification and measurement. As with *Writings on Gia Định*, local place names and even the ethnic identity of local people was trivial as long as local people participated in the system of land registration and paid their taxes.

Double Translation of the Delta Landscape

While French marines launched the colonial conquest with a naval assault on Đà Nẵng on August 31, 1858, a French presence in Việt Nam had existed for more than a century before. Missionaries, mercenaries and merchants had worked in various communities and the Nguyễn Court. The Catholic missionary Pigneau de Behaine aided Nguyễn Ánh from mission posts at Hòn Chông and Hà Tiên in the 1780's. French military officers such as Olivier de Puymanel and Philippe Vannier trained the Nguyễn troops

[71] This list comes from Nguyễn Đình Đầu's extensive series of projects on the *địa bộ* in the 1990's. In particular, he published 6 volumes on the 6 former provinces, describing in detail examples of complete land entries in the địa bộ and area analyses of land cover and etymologies of place names from 1836. See Nguyễn Đình Đầu. *Tổng Kết Nghiên Cứu Địa Bộ Nam Kỳ Lục Tỉnh.* (Hồ Chí Minh City: NXB Hồ Chí Minh & Toyota Foundation, 1994), 20-22.

and assisted in the design of citadels. Vannier worked with Gia Long's architect Trần Văn Học to map Sài Gòn and lay out its new citadel.[72] He was also most likely the foreign minister for King Ming Mạng who greeted the Crawfurd Mission in 1822.[73]

An important distinction between early French advisors and those who arrived after the colonial conquest (1858-1867) was the way that their knowledge fit within the state. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, French advisors such as Puymanel (Ông Tín) and Vannier (Ông Chấn) worked within the world of the Nguyễn Court.[74] Their ideas in mapmaking, citadel design and military strategy melded into older Vietnamese military and geomantic practices.[75] The French advisors were more or less invisible as Frenchmen. When the French Navy formally took possession of the "six provinces" of Cochinchina (*Nam Kỳ Lục Tỉnh*) in 1967, a new cadre of military men and technical specialists engaged in a reversed translation of Vietnamese knowledge about the

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[72] Thái Văn Kiểm, "Interpretation d'une carte ancienne de Saigon," *Bulletin de la Societe des Études Indochinoises*, XXXVII, no. 4 (1962), 413.

[73] John Crawfurd, *Journal of an Embassy to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1967), 215-216. The original edition was published in 1828 (London: Henry Colburn, 1828). It was very possibly Vannier who met the Crawfurd Mission in 1822 at Huế and was their primary informant on the new king Minh Mạng. After 36 years in Cochin China, with a Vietnamese wife, 3 sons and 7 daughters, Vannier left the service of Minh Mạng in 1825 and returned to France where he lived in Bretagne until his death in 1842.

[74] These accounts of French in the service of the Nguyễn are recorded in detail in various missionary letters written during the Nguyễn – Tây Sơn wars. One collection of these letters was published by L. Cadière in 1926. See L. Cadière, "Les Français au Service de Gia-Long," *Bulletin des Amis de Vieux Huế* 13 No. 3 (1926), 360. Perhaps not surprisingly, even the Vietnamese names of these French officers do not appear often in the Vietnamese histories. One historical question that remains with regard to pre-1820 French officers serving Gia Long is to what extent their role was over-emphasized by colonial scholars in the 1920's eager to connect French activity more closely within the Nguyễn Court.

[75] One of the most comprehensive discussions of the old Gia Định citadels is Louis Malleret, "Elément d'Une Monographie dea Anciennes Fortifications et Citadelles de Saigon," *Bulletin de la Société des Études Indochinoises* X, No. 4 (October-December 1935): 5-108. In this essay, Malleret pays particular attention to problems in Auburet's 1863 translation of the *Writings* with regard to its historical and geographical accuracy (27-28).

landscape and water into French language and French ideas about hydraulics, politics, and history.

When French engineers and explorers began their surveys of the delta's waterways after 1867, they read the water—canals, rivers, and floods—using translated accounts of older Vietnamese literature. They frequently started with Auburet's 1863 edition of *Writings*.[76] Auburet abridged some sections and transcribed the Chinese and *Nôm* characters into a romanized alphabet (*quốc ngữ*), but he kept the organization and structure of the original work.[77] Colonial surveyors and writers thus absorbed the Court-inspired system of names, history, and local culture into a more French perspective on waterways, history, and native people.

Auburet's translation was especially important for the new colonial pastime of archaeology. Dr. Albert Corré, a naval doctor posted to Cochinchina in 1880, reported one excursion from the new colonial capital at Sài Gòn to Ba Thê Mountain deep in the Long Xuyên Quadrangle. With a few week's leave from duties, he visited three sites noted in *Writings* for ancient ceramic or stone relics. He stayed for two nights with the

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[76] *GĐTTC*, 6. Originally published in 1820 in the demotic Han script, *Nôm*. The 1863 French version is Trình Hoài Đức. *Histoire et Description de la Basse Cochinchine (Pays de Gia-dinh): Traduites Pour la Première Fois, D'après le Texte Chinois Original, par G. Aubaret.* Louis Auburet, Translator. (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale 1863).
[77] *GĐTTC*, 13.

new *administrateur* at Long Xuyên before starting his journey to the remote mountain.[78] The provincial official arranged for the official steamboat and a host of guards to convey Corré and his friend to the mountain. After traveling along the Thoại Hà Canal, they disembarked from the steamboat at the entrance to a creek "that [Đức] named Pha-trach." He noted that "Mandarin Thoại" had cleared the creek to small boat traffic during construction of the main canal. In 1880, however, only the smallest wooden longboat could pass through the mat of water hyacinths (*lục bình*) clogging the creek. One of the local guides poled the boat for two hours through the weeds, while Corré noted the strong sun and swarms of mosquitoes.[79]

Once arriving at the mountain, he confirmed its shape with that described in *Writings*, a large cone with three summits measuring 30 "truongs" high and 13 "lis" around, "according to the Annamites."[80] He also described the prosperous scene of people who were "apparently Khmer by language and custom" living along the base of the mountain. At the time of the visit, just after the annual September floods had subsided, he also noted the concentration of tigers isolated in the forested upper portion of the mountain. He related how the tigers routinely "kidnapped" local livestock and prevented any forays into the woods above the farms.

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[78] A. Corré, "Rapport sur de Nouvelles Recherches Relatives a l'Age de la Pierre Polie et du Bronze en Indo-Chine Par le Docteur A. Corre, Médécin de 1re Classe de la Marine," *Excursions et Reconnaissances* No. 3 (1880), 362.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid. Actually, the original Vietnamese measure of circumference was 13 dặm. See Đức, *Writings*, 50.

Upon arrival at several caves noted in the *Writings*, Corré described in exacting detail each piece of "polished stone" found along with footnotes describing various ways of recording characteristics of the pieces. His helpers assisted him in making rubbings on "Chinese paper" of inscriptions that appeared to be an ancient form of Khmer.[81] After returning from the trip, he sent the inscriptions to M. Etienne Aymonier, the Résident Générale of the new French Protectorate of Cambodia.[82] Corré noted that this "very distinguished *savant*" had not replied at the time of his writing the report "as to their archaeological value."[83]

Corré's re-reading and expansion of the original 1820 description of the site reveals the importance that the original Vietnamese account held in guiding the survey and also the intense fascination that Corré and other such "tourists" had in documenting and cataloguing ancient monuments and relics in the colony. These early French surveys were two-way conversations with a new community of French "experts" on ancient relics and the "pre-conquest" community of Vietnamese "experts". Particularly in his assessment of the creek, Corré established a natural corollary to an important colonial

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[81] Ibid., 365.

[82] Aymonier (1844-1929) was a Captain in the French Navy and was pivotal to the establishment of the Ecole Française de l'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) in 1899. In 1880, he was serving as Résident Générale in Cambodia and engaged in the first major catalogues of inscriptions and monuments in the Khmer kingdom. In 1876 he published *Géographie du Cambodge*, and followed this work with descriptions of Cham relics (1891), explorations in Laos (1895), and a 3-volume work on Cambodia published from 1900-1904. Aymonier was a founding member of the Ecole Française de l'Extrême-Orient in 1899 and created in 1908 the colonial office in charge of preserving monuments at Angkor, Conservation de Angkor. See Etienne Aymonier, *Le Cambodge*, Volumes 1-3 (Paris: E. Laroux, 1900-1904). Etienne Aymonier, *Géographie du Cambodge* (Paris: E. Laroux, 1876).

[83] Corré, 366.

historical theme of social decay. The image of abandoned waterways covered in weeds justified subsequent renovation just as the abandoned ruins at Angkor Wat merited a kind of "social renovation."

A naval hydrographer, J. Rénaud, continued this study of dilapidated waterways and Nguyễn inscriptions in greater detail during his 1879 survey of the Vĩnh Tế Canal. He surveyed the waterway as a potential new colonial public works project. Traveling on a naval gunboat with a large (and armed) crew, Rénaud took depth measurements and mapped the navigable route of the canal. Upon reaching the tombs of Thoại Ngọc Hầu and his wife Châu Thị Tế at the base of Núi Sâm, he disembarked with his crew. Guides showed him the old steles and translators explained their meaning. Rénaud used the occasion in his report to launch a subtle critique of the colonial project that he believed was duty-bound to continue "the work of civilization begun by the Vietnamese":

> At the time these works were constructed, according to the writing here, the Vietnamese were where we are today with regard to the waterways and the situation in Cambodia...12 years since we conquered this part of Cochinchina, and we have yet to repair these formidable works...[84]

The culmination of this double translation was a series of provincial monographs that duplicated Đức's *Writings* in reproducing the listings of mountains and rivers before

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[84] J. Renaud, "Etude sur l'approfondissement du canal de Vinh-té et l'amelioration du port d'Hatien," *Excursions et Reconnaissances* No. 1 (1879), 66.

continuing with more contemporary subheadings on population, history, and economy. The Société des Etudes Indochinoises' *Géographie Physique, Économique et Historique de la Cochinchine* appended onto Dức's old lists of place-names those of colonial origin; the new monographs also appended Dức's pre-1820 version of the region's history with the major events after the 1859 conquest.[85]

Such a colonial incorporation of the Nguyễn histories and inscriptions elevated the Nguyễn Court's understanding of delta nature and delta society at the expense of local narratives and environmental knowledge not recorded on paper or stone. The delta in 1880 was still a region inhabited by diverse people with different traditions, languages, religions, and worldviews. Except for the few mandarins and historians who thought about the delta in classical terms, the great majority of people living in the region associated more with specific ethnic and religious groups: Chinese trade associations, Khmer Buddhist clergy, Catholic missionaries, Vietnamese mandarins, and local rebels.

Conclusion

By studying the historical and natural context in which the Nguyễn story of the delta was produced, two ideas emerge. First, in agreement with Paul Carter's study of English settlement in Australia, the processes of surveying, describing and building an

[85] Société des Études Indo-Chinoises, *Géographie Physique, Économique et Historique de la Cochinchine: Monographie de la Province de Châu-Đôc, VI Fascicule* (Saigon: Imprimerie L. Ménard, 1902). From 1901 – 1911, BSEI published 14 monographs.

official narrative of Vietnamese development in the region assumes to a certain extent that the delta before was a kind of "blank stage" where the Vietnamese "southern expansion" (*nam tiến*) unfolded.[86] Second, by studying local practices—the creation of more local spatial narratives—Nguyễn ideas of the delta are complicated by locally blended or improvised traditions, language, and agricultural practices. Settlers frequently adopted local tools, seed, and livestock. They also built shrines for existing local deities such as Bà Chúa Xứ and Neak Tà (Ông Tà) in addition to building new temples for their familiar gods.

One of the largest missing elements in the production of 19th century Vietnamese space (and early colonial space) were these local spaces. Nguyễn sources suggest that Khmer, Cham and Chinese leaders (and local rebels such as Lê Văn Khôi) were practiced "shared sovereignty" where individual leaders paid tribute to the Nguyễn Court and possibly other protectors—perhaps the Siamese or the French—as a means of preserving some local autonomy.[87] Beyond these alliances reported from the Nguyễn perspective, there is very little hint as to the kinds of spatial narratives that these local leaders sponsored within their shrinking fiefdoms. Beyond these local elites, historical

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[86] Paul Carter argues for the importance of recognizing the historiographical problems implicit in the idea of land as a fixed stage for successive historical events. He begins his study on the English settlement of Australia with a critique of the "land as a blank stage" trope. A major contribution of this work for environmental history is that it shows through research in various indigenous and outsider narratives how different understandings of space are created through repetition of stories, designation of place names, and translations of indigenous names into foreign languages. See Paul Carter, *Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), xxii.

[87] Thongchai Winichakul, Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation (Honolulu HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 84.

sources, Vietnamese and French, are almost entirely silent about the activities of local people. Those local people not educated or employed by a royal court or the colonial regime only appear in local legends or the reports of local uprisings such as that of Lê Văn Khôi. What we do know about local uprisings supports the idea that local life was frequently adaptive and fluid like the surrounding environment. Perhaps one of the most poignant examples of this blending of traditions was the rise of a new messianic Buddhist sect called Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương in 1849. Historian Huê Tâm Hồ-Tai suggests that the absence of traditional Vietnamese village support structures in the frontier region of the Long Xuyên Quadrangle combined with outbreaks of cholera and frequent intrusions by marauding armies gave rise to this syncretic tradition. A man who described himself as the Buddha Master of Western Peace began preaching and practicing a form of faith-healing from Sâm Mountain above the banks of the Vĩnh Tế Canal and Thoại Ngọc Hầu's steles. He blended mysticism with Vietnamese and Khmer Buddhist practices and soon attracted a large following of both Khmer and Vietnamese.[88] One of his followers, Trần Văn Thành, led a second group of followers to the Seven Mountains region (*Bảy Thưa*) and established more villages. It was from Seven Mountains that Thành later led a six-year rebellion with over 500 partisans against the French from 1867-1873.[89] There is little written evidence that survives from the followers of Thành or the leader himself. Until the early 1900's, most local people,

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[88] Huê-Tâm Hồ Tai, *Millenarianism and Peasant Politics in Vietnam* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 8-12.
[89] Trần Thị Thu Lương and Võ Thành Phương, *Khởi Nghĩa Bảy Thưa (1867-1973)* (TP Hồ Chí Minh: NXB TP Hồ Chí Minh, 1991), 50.

including rebel leaders, remained virtually invisible in the sources. Hence their spatial narratives remain largely untold and not included in subsequent histories.

The inscribed world of the water landscape recorded in steles, the vestiges of old projects and written works was an ordered and "harmonic" vision of a watery frontier that had never been physically (or politically) stable for long. Delineating the border at any given time in the 19th century between "harmonic" pastoral landscapes and "chaotic" conditions remains a difficult historical task. Certainly many settlers, especially wealthier ones, repeated the official names and listed their properties in the *địa bộ*; thus they participated in their village's politics and broader transactions. Thousands of poorer people also joined the Nguyễn armies and moved to work on canal projects, often settling just outside the walls of garrisons in newly irrigated territories.

This task of distinguishing between different local realities is further complicated by French colonial writers and officials who translated the Nguyễn story as an important narrative foundation into their own colonial projects that followed. French comparisons of the delta in 1867 with the delta in 1820 supported an important legitimizing narrative of social decay. A landscape of flooded fields clogged by silted, weed-covered waterways and the romantic allure of abandoned ruins from ancient civilizations provided an authenticating blueprint for subsequent "civilizing missions." Nguyễn histories and geographies offered the French an appealing, mystical vision of Oriental

order in the not-too-distant past that mirrored their own goals for a new colonial order of people, land and water in the not-too-distant future.

CHAPTER II: MANAGED NETWORKS, CONSTRUCTIVE ALLIANCES AND PENELOPE'S WEB (1880-1930)

Since the first years of colonial rule, French planners viewed canals as a means to integrate the delta more closely into a colonial state centered at Sài Gòn. From 1866 to 1930, colonial engineers initiated a series of waterway projects that required dredging more than 174 million cubic meters of earth; this was comparable in scale to projects at Suez and Panama (260 and 210 cubic meters respectively).[1] Maps of the Mekong Delta from 1890 to 1930 describe a growing web-like expansion of waterways from the capital at Sài Gòn to the river port at Mỹ Tho and outwards across the forests and swamps of the lower regions of the delta (Figure 2.1). Thousands of migrants followed the dredges, finding work as tenant farmers on plantations along the main canals.

Realizing this web of waterways as a "manageable" system, however, was perpetually elusive. For every new project, there were often complications caused by sedimentation, flooding, or disruptions to existing irrigation networks. While the unprecedented scale of construction completely altered the social and physical landscape, it never achieved for the engineers and administrators a network that could

[1] Inspection des Travaux Publics, Gouvernement Générale de l'Indochine, *Dragages de Cochinchine: Canal Rachgia-Hatien* (Saigon: [s.n.], 1930), 20.

be "managed". As one observer noted in 1880, canals were like the "work of Penelope", projects without end.[2]

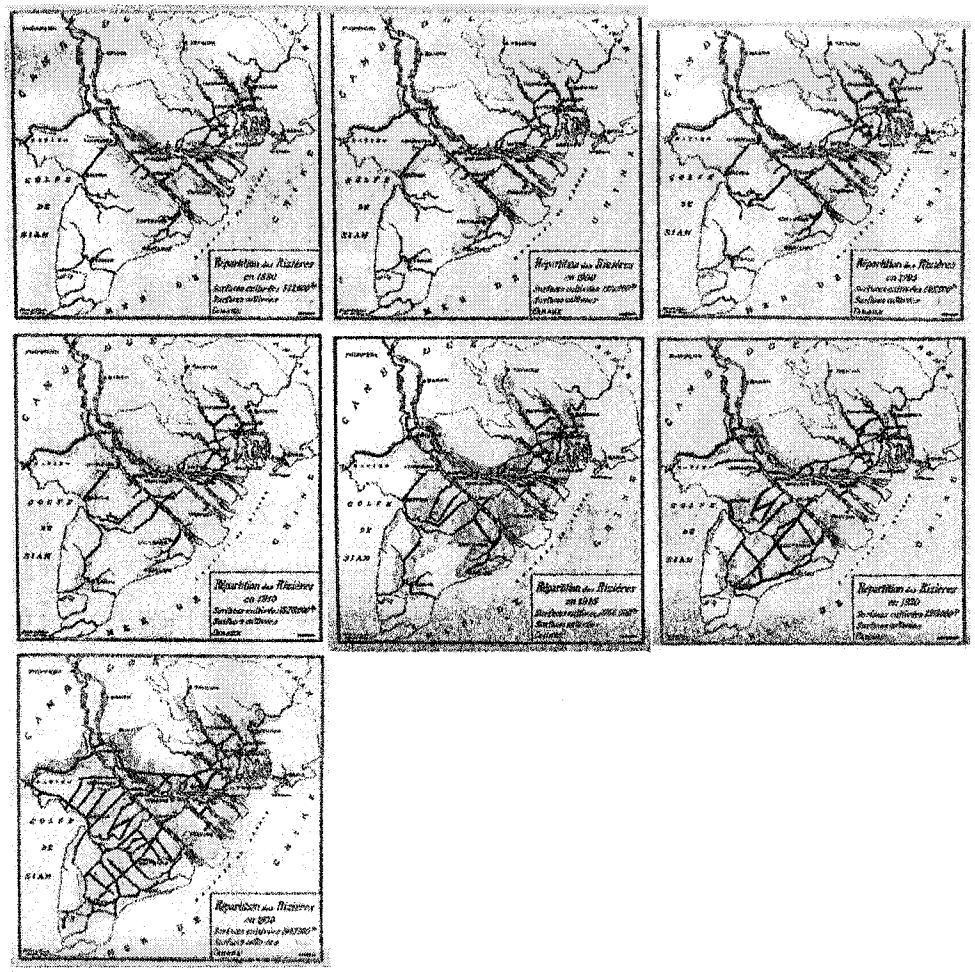
The metaphoric comparison of the canal-building effort to the "work of Penelope" is useful in understanding colonial ambitions in a state of constant constructive and destructive forces—both natural and social. Like the threads in Penelope's robe, each waterway linked natural and social forces that, once connected, often threatened to undo the work in unpredictable ways. Public works engineers and their allies in the colonial government were professionally and politically involved in a constant struggle to shore up their waterways against what they viewed as a complex form of social and natural entropy. For a brief period in the early 1900's, the engineers and their allies outpaced their political and natural opposition.

Dredging was also not a singular enterprise of the colonial state; as a process it was located within a longer history of settlement. The process of locating new canals often depended on the existing arrangement of cities, trade routes, and pathways. There were many different actors involved in land conversion and hydraulic work. Like engineers, local farmers engaged in their own works to control soil and water regimes. The difference between local and state projects was primarily a political and spatial

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[2] Ch. Combier, *Rapports présentés à S.E. Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies sur les Grands Travaux Projetés en Cochinchine* (1881), 4°/904(3), Trung Tâm Thông Tin Khoa Học Xã Hội, Hà Nội. Penelope was the wife of Ulysses. During his absence in the Trojan Wars, she fended off anxious suitors by promising to choose one when she finished

problem. Colonial engineers worked almost exclusively within the conceptual spaces of topographic maps and the political spaces of the colonial métropole, Sài Gòn. Their goal was to link the capital with colonial towns in the delta, drawing canals as lines across a blank representational space on the maps. Over time, they envisioned that these "blank" spaces would be filled with plantations, roads, waterways, and homesteads.



weaving a robe. In order to avoid this day coming, she undid her weaving each night. The term was used by Combier in his criticism of early project plans.

Figure 2.1: Canal Projects 1880-1930: The above images (left to right) detail major canals constructed in the dredging campaigns. The first major new project after 1898 was the Xà No Canal that appears in the 1905 map. By 1920 (center right), the Department of Public Works had dredged the Quản Lộ– Phụng Hiệp Canal to the Cà Mau Peninsula. The 1930 map (bottom) shows 5 new canals in the Long Xuyên Plain with the Rạch Giá – Hà Tiên Canal skirting the Gulf coast. Only one major east-west canal crossed the Đồng Tháp in 1930. Source: Government General de l'Indochine, Inspection Générale des Travaux Publics. *Dragages de Cochinchine: Canal Rachgia-Hatien.* Saigon (1930), pp. 87-90.

Public Works engineers wanted to convert the blank spaces of the delta into an endless horizon of rice. New canal projects, some thirty meters wide with clay banks rising three meters above the plain, were like giants inevitably crushing tiny structures in their path. Many of these projects along with this spatial assumption of blank space broke down when local conflicts emerged. Because the waterways were part of an extensive web of hydrologic and ecological processes, local disruptions often had distributive effects. The social and hydraulic failures of projects in some places quickly spread to other areas. Like Penelope undoing her weaving at night, these mounting environmental and social crises eventually outpaced the constructive momentum of the state.

Connecting the Métropole to the Mekong (1867-1884)

One of the first, most important water projects was to connect the colonial capital Sài Gòn with the Mekong River port Mỹ Tho. The Mekong Delta was the believed entrance to a "river road" that led to China; it had also long been a refuge for anti-colonial rebels. French naval and expeditionary forces defeated Vietnamese forces at

Sài Gòn (Gia Định) in 1862 in gunboat battles, but fighting continued in the delta for five more years. Some mandarins and popular leaders formed guerilla armies to attack French outposts on the watery frontiers; they lured boats into shallow creeks where they were more vulnerable to attack. Eventually, the French gunboat crews forced surrenders at the river citadels Vĩnh Thành and Châu Đốc in 1867, formally ending the war. The French Navy then assumed administrative control of all six provinces in 1867, naming the new colony Cochinchina.

Since the first treaty with the Vietnamese kingdom was concluded in 1862, the admirals had continued building an urban center or *métropole* along the banks of the Sài Gòn River. While the city was defensible because of its location within this smaller watershed, it was also more remote from the prized delta. In a colony won by "gunboat diplomacy" and administered by admirals, control of the Mekong River was essential to French ambitions at the time to develop commercial routes to China. The Mekong Delta was a more difficult terrain for the French; anti-colonial battles wore on for five more years until the Hue Court was forced to sign a second treaty in 1867. This led to the establishment of the Cochinchina Colony. In 1871, the ruling admirals organized a *Commission des Arroyos* to investigate water routes and recommend improvements to channels that might improve navigation.[3] The commission never completed these surveys in part because uprisings continued in the rural areas to 1873. In 1875, Admiral

[3]Brossard de Corbigny, "Notice sur les Travaux de Canalisation de la Cochinchine Française," *Revue Maritime et Coloniale* 59 (1878), 515.

Duperré established another committee to return to the problem. The government then moved ahead and built several canals linking the major delta towns in the east with Sài Gòn: Trà Ôn (1876), Chờ Gạo/Duperré (1877), Chét Say (1878), Phu Tuc (1878), Mirador (1879), and Saintard (1879) (Figure 2.2).[4]

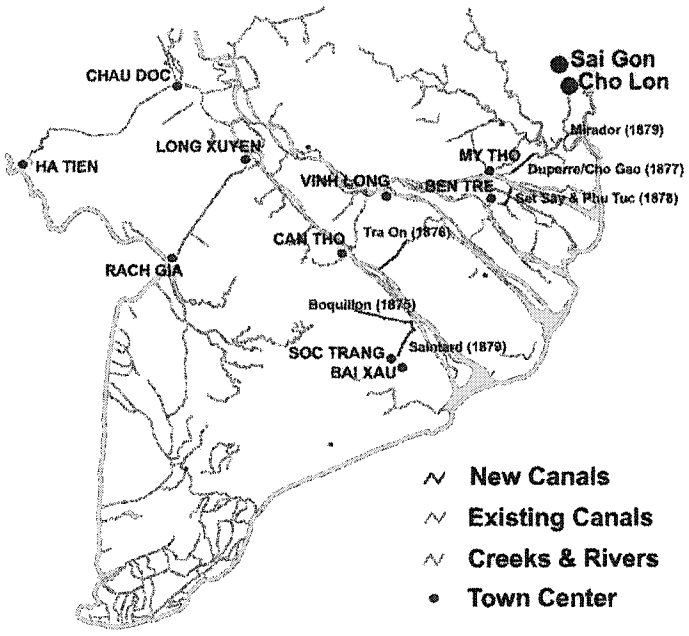


Figure 2.2: New Canal Projects Constructed by the Commission des Arroyos (1875-1879). The Boquillon Canal (1875) was actually a local project supported by the local administrator Boquillon who also had established a plantation along the route.

Of these, Chờ Gạo was the most important and most expensive link; it connected Sài Gòn via the two Vàm Co Rivers to Mỹ Tho. Mỹ Tho was a major river town in the

[4] Direction Générale des Travaux Publics, Gouvernement Générale de l'Indochine, *Voies d'Eau de la Cochinchine* (Saigon: Imprimerie Nouvelle, 1911), 84-85.

delta, thriving with commerce predominantly run by ethnic Chinese families. From here, steamships could travel by the rivers and winding creeks to points upriver in Cambodia and the towns on the lower branch of the Mekong River. The canal reduced travel time by steamship from a sixteen-hour trip over open water and dangerous shoals to an eight-hour trip on inland waterways.[5]

The project required 25,240 laborers, each working as a conscripted or *corvée* laborer for about a month. The channel was only 11 kilometers in length, but work dragged on for more than a year until 1878. Both women and men worked on the projects, and crews suffered from outbreaks of cholera other epidemics spread by polluted water. After establishment of a civilian government in 1879, Governor Le Myre de Vilers abolished *corvée*. The colony's Chief Engineer then condemned its use in state projects. Noting that abolishment of corvée had been a platform of the French Revolution, he wrote for French readers that use of unpaid labor was not acceptable in Cochinchina. He estimated the cost of the Chờ Gạo Canal with paid laborers at more than 1.4 million francs or 1 fr. 66 per cubic meter.[6] This figure equaled an entire year's construction budget for buildings and roads in Sài Gòn. The actual money spent on the project was less than half of that at 600,000 francs.[7]

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[5] Ibid. p. 513.
[6] Cochinchine Française, *Les Travaux Publics et Les Voies de Communication en Cochinchine* (Saigon: Imprimerie Nationale, 1880), 94.
[7] Brossard de Corbigny, "Notice sur les Travaux," 520.

The finished canal was initially a success, but within months, bars of silt formed across the main channel and reduced the water depth at low tide to less than one meter. All but the Mirador Canal were choked off by bars of silt called *dôs d'âne* ("donkey backs", *lưng tôm* or "shrimp backs" in Vietnamese). *Dos d'âne* formed where opposing water currents met and silt fell from the stilled water. Because the delta was so flat, tides caused water flowing in smaller creeks and canals to reverse its current daily. With this diurnal action, "dead points" occurred in the same place and sediment built up into wide bars, some growing to a few hundred meters long, effectively preventing passage by larger ships. This effect extended more than 60 km inland. On the new canals silt soon blocked the entire channel. [8] Re-dredging was an expensive operation that threatened to tie down resources indefinitely. Problems with labor shortages led officials to support steam dredging as a mechanized alternative.

While colonial engineers regarded *dos d'âne* as "dead points," local residents considered them to be important "meeting points" (*giáp nước*). The village of Thủ Thưa on a small canal linking the two Vàm Co Rivers was a stopover for inter-regional commerce.[9] People from one end of the canal traveled to the *giáp nước* to buy and sell their goods—areca, coconut, oranges, sugar, rice, etc. Farmers rowing longboats used the shift in currents to time their trips. After high tide peaked and the current reversed,

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[8] *Voies d'Eau*, 34.

[9] *Bảy Ngày Trong Đồng Tháp* is a rich memoir of travels in the Đồng Tháp region augmented with information from historic texts and local histories. He gives a detailed explanation of the ways that *giáp nước* aided development of markets and transport in the delta. Nguyễn Hiền Lê, *Bảy Ngày Trong Đồng Tháp: Du Ký và Biên Khảo* (Long An: NXB Long An, 1989), 23-28.

they returned home keeping all day with the current. In cases of longer travel, a person might rest at the *giáp nước* before continuing on—again staying with the current. Local people adapted to this strong influence—rather than work to eliminate them, they developed *giáp nước* into nodes in the delta's networks and spaces.

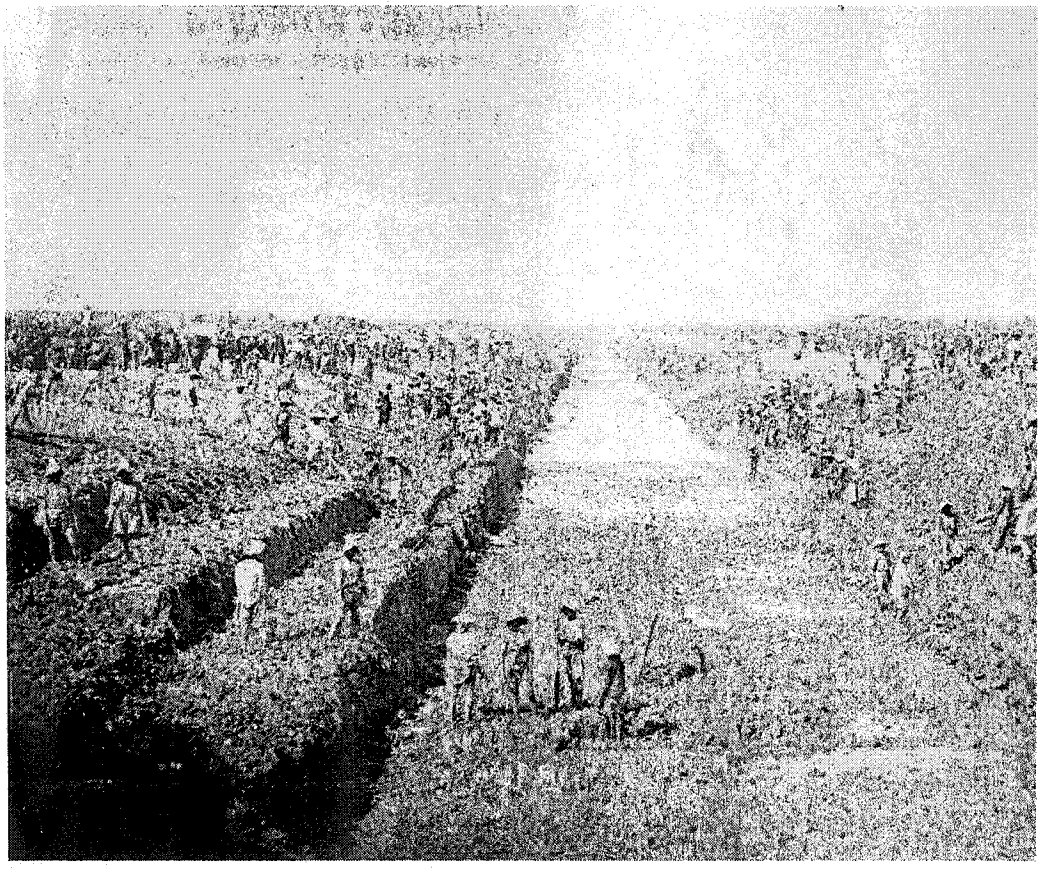


Figure 2.3: Chợ Gạo Canal Project: This print attributed to Emile Gsell (circa 1876-1877) shows the construction of canal banks by *corvée*. Source: Albumin photo on paper, presented to Governor Le Myre de Vilers by the Colonial Council in 1882. Donated to the Foreign Affairs Library in 1894. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Paris, "Le Myre de Vilers" No. A000760.

The tidal fluctuation of water in creeks was also beneficial for rice. Water levels in the arroyos (*rạch*) and irrigation ditches (*mương*) rose and fell daily from several meters in depth to a bare, exposed channel bed. This tidal ebb and flow was an important source of clean water and fertilizer. Water in the fields slowly leached hydrogen sulfate (H_2SO_4) from aerated soil. If allowed to sit for too long, the acidic water dissolved aluminum and iron ions and stunted plants. To prevent this buildup of "alum," farmers frequently drained water from the paddy by opening the dikes and letting water escape while the tide was out. When the tide rose again, fresh water from the river filled the ditches and returned to the paddy. For this reason, the most highly prized farmland in the delta was the alluvial region crossed by hundreds of sinuous creeks. Nature provided a system of irrigation that required almost no extra labor. Local people and metropolitan engineers held fundamentally different ideas about the way that nature and water *worked.* Engineers, standing in one of the flattest deltas in the world, were effectively blind to the rural functions of the terrain and confused by a hydrology that was by all standards exotic.

Hydraulic failures, expenses, and labor difficulties might have ended water projects if the French parliament had not reorganized the colony under civilian rule in 1879. The new Republican government transferred control of Cochinchina to civilian authorities. This transfer had significant effects for public works in Cochinchina. Before leaving his command in Sài Gòn, Admiral Jauréguiberry lauded the transfer, declaring:

> "The moment has finally arrived to affirm our sovereignty through creations of public utility, proving to the Annamites that we are above all their benefactors. In this point of view, the maintenance of canals, creation of roads, construction of bridges, study of railroads, and establishment of hospitals and schools will be the object of our preoccupation."[10]

Governor Le Myre de Vilers, an experienced civil service officer, replaced the admiral and called for a comprehensive study of the Delta's waterways as part of a new mission to "improve" the colony. Exactly which concerns—military, economic, or social—guided the surveying was not clear. This brief period of transition and rhetoric resulted in an expanded discourse on the future design of the colony.

The governor sent J. Renaud, a naval hydrographer, on the gunboat *Hache* to study *dos d'âne* and survey future projects. Renaud visited waterways after the monsoon floods began to recede in October 1879. For two weeks, the crew surveyed the old channel of the Vĩnh Tế Canal on the border with Cambodia. The canal and the small sea port were important transit points for linking up the China Sea trade with extraction of resources from the Cambodian interior. By 1879, Bangkok had become the commercial hub of mainland Southeast Asia. It exported 1.8 million piculs (108,000 tons) of freight annually to Hong Kong, 75% of that being rice. Renaud expressed his frustrations that

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[10] Thévenet, *Les Travaux Publics et les Voies de Communication en Cochinchine* (Saigon: Imprimerie Nationale, 1880), 1. "Le moment est enfin venu d'affirmer notre souveraineté par des créations d'utilité générale, prouvant aux Annamites que nous voulons surtout être leurs bienfaiteurs. A ce point de vue, le maintien en bon état des canaux, la création des routes, la construction des ponts, les études de voies ferrées, la fondation d'hôpitaux et d'écoles doivent être l'objet de vos préoccupations."

the French colonial government had not yet reclaimed the canals, especially since the principal trading houses in Bangkok at the time were French."[11]

The crew focused its attentions on more immediate problems at the Chờ Gạo Canal. Renaud was concerned that failing to build new waterways undermined colonial interests in controlling commerce. The shallow waterways prevented easy access for French steamers while allowing native sailboats and junks continued free reign over commerce. Deeper waterways then were vital for realizing colonial power in local trade:

> ...From a purely economic point of view, in this country of river navigation *par excellence*, where each center of the [western delta] would provide quite sufficient freight to feed a service of large riverboats ... to move rice freight distances of 100 miles on assembled longboats with 10 to 15 oarsmen, moored against the bank when the current is opposing, obliged in each *rạch* [arroyo] to wait until high tide to cross the *dos d'âne*, this is nonsense! ... Under this pretext, our trade is in the hands of the Chinese, and we are of late conducting our commerce on their terms. [12]

French steamers, requiring cords of wood and clearance in the channels, could not compete. To Renaud, the existing system of trade flourished in the *natural* movement

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[11] J. Renaud, "Etude sur l'approfondissement du canal de Vinh-té," 85. "Or Saigon est en ce moment sans aucune relation avec Bangkok, et le fait est d'autant plus étonnant que Bangkok est une des rares places de commerce du monde ou les principales maisons sont françaises."

[12] J. Renaud, "Étude d'un Projet de Canal Entre le Vaico et le Cua-Tieu," *Excursions et Reconnaissances* No. 3 (1880), 317. "Mais au point vue purement économique, dans ce pays de la navigation fluviale par excellence, qui dans chaque centre de l'ouest fournirait un fret bien suffisant pour alimenter un service de gros bateaux de fleuve, faire parcourir des distances de 100 milles aux sacs de riz sur des barques montées de 10 à 15 rameurs, amarrées à la berge lorsque le courant est contraire, obligées dans chaque rach d'attendre la haute mer pour passer le dos d'âne, c'est un non-sens, et sous prétexte que notre commerce est entre les mains des Chinois, nous sommes au point de vue de l'outillage commerciale plus en retard qu'ils ne le sont chez eux."

of creeks and canals. Local merchants *adapted* to fit the water regime and not vice versa. Digging new waterways was then a rejection of this indigenous nature and people who chose to work within it.

After the crew returned to the capital, Chief Engineer Thévenet proposed a ten-year package of public works to the newly formed Colonial Council. The Council had passed a series of new taxation schemes to pay for these works. The Council narrowly approved the public works program—five French and four Vietnamese approved and seven French opposed. Under Thévenet's program, the colony would pay 6.4 million francs annually for ten years to cover the costs of new roads, canals, and railways. Almost a third of this budget would come from opium sales and another from the rice tax; the final third would come from the Ministry of the Navy and Colonies in Paris.[13]

Alarmed by the ambitious and expensive plans, the Ministry designated one of its engineers, Charles Combier, to visit Cochinchina and investigate. Combier, a civil engineer and graduate of the École Polytechnique in Paris, traveled there in 1880. His investigation caused uproar both in the colony and at home, especially over the issue of opium. Combier examined the proposed projects on technical and moral grounds, introducing for perhaps the first time in colonial planning a set of ethical questions aimed directly at France's proposed *mission civilisatrice* in Cochinchina. In his first

[13] Le Myre de Vilers, *La Politique Coloniale Française Depuis 1830* (Paris: Publication de la Nouvelle Revue, 1913), 12.

report, he described in explicit terms his disgust that opium revenues would subsidize new projects:

> The first wealth of a country is man. All other wealth proceeds from him and is intended for his use, with the satisfaction of his needs or pleasures. However, it is known well that the abuse of opium, since the first tests, quickly reaches man's sources of intelligence and life...and it promptly makes him useless to the society and himself, before killing him. However, we have created, by the institution of an opium monopoly, a company whose benefit rests only on the disastrous propagation of this addiction.[14]

These reports soon leaked to the French press and debates erupted over a public works campaign intended to "lift up" indigenous people based on profits derived from their addiction to opium. If the routes of Cochinchina fostered opium sellers travel around the colony, then the routes and the engineers who designed them would be responsible for "accelerating the demise of the Annamite people."[15] He did not go so far as to condemn the French presence in Cochinchina altogether, but he did target some of the canal projects as ill planned and technically unfeasible.[16]

The Ministry was perhaps more interested in Combier's financial assessment of waterways versus a plan to build a rail network across the delta. Railroads at the time

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[14] Combier, *Rapports présentés à S.E. Ministre*, 3. "La première richesse d'un pays, c'est l'homme. Toutes les autres richesses procédent de lui et sont destinées à son usage, à la satisfaction de ses besoins ou de ses plaisirs. Or, on sait bien que l'abus de l'opium suit de bien prés les premiers essais, que cet abus atteint rapidement chez l'homme les sources de l'intelligence et de la vie, et qu'il le rend promptement inutile à la société et à lui-même, avant de le tuer. Or, nous créé, par l'institution de la ferme d'opium, une société dont les bénéfices reposent uniquement sur la propagation d'une passion funeste."

[15] Ibid., 4.

[16] Ibid., 3.

promised a more "modern" network, and many Frenchmen including Thevenet saw development of rail links as a way to move the shipping business, especially transportation of European manufactures, out of Chinese hands. Combier responded to this proposal on financial grounds. He compared the costs of rice shipment by junk with rice shipment by rail. A 70-ton junk with 14 workers taking a cargo of rice 178 kilometers from Cần Thơ to Chợ Lớn cost 264.42 francs. This included all transfers from smaller to larger boats and unloading in Chợ Lớn. The proposed cost by rail did not account for transshipment, the cost of construction for granaries at the rail terminals, or the costs of rail tariffs. Combier estimated that rail costs were more than triple those of water transportation. He favored using the delta's "natural" advantage, extending a continuous waterway network.[17]

While he supported the idea of waterways, he rejected Renaud's propositions. He challenged Renaud's assumptions of water conditions and considered the difficulty in linking distinctive coastal and river water systems across such a depressed floodplain. On economic grounds, he claimed that the redevelopment of Vĩnh Tế would only aid Siamese competitors in bringing their merchandise to the delta. These were in fact "works of Penelope," projects that would have no end.[18]

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[17] Ibid., 9.
[18] Ibid., 19.

With this allusion, Combier touched on one of the fundamental problems with the French hydraulic network. There was no easy way to separate and protect colonial from native interests on the waterways. The Suez Canal required maintenance and improvement, but the singular route was vital to global commerce and easy to control. The web of waterways in faraway Cochinchina, constantly shifting with floods and tides, was a distant concern on the far edge of the empire. As a result of Combier's report, the governor postponed future hydraulic works citing the difficulties posed by *dos d'âne*. Renaud and Thévenet urged construction of a larger, second canal to replace Chờ Gạo. The proposed bypass was an act of desperation in the face of insurmountable political and natural challenges. Rather than modify French boats and the colonial state, they continued their struggle to reconstruct the hydraulic landscape into two different types of waterways: "one for steamers with a strong wake and the other for boats of less importance."[19] Ultimately, however, colonial shipping was left to the same old routes.

The Ministry did support construction of a 70-km railroad running parallel to Chờ Gạo. Work crews began construction in 1882 and completed it on July 18, 1885. Two steel bridges spanned the Vàm Co Rivers; the Tan An Bridge, a steel construction designed by Gustav Eiffel's enterprise and pre-fabricated at Levallois-Perret on the Seine, was 342 meters long and still stands today (Figure 2.4). In terms of benefiting French commerce and industry, the railway project was quickly hailed as a success. Contrasted with the old waterways, the railway clearly divided the landscape into indigenous and

[19] R. Gentilini. *Les Voies de Communication en Cochinchine* (Paris: Imprimerie Chaix, 1886), 28.

colonial spaces. While it required greater costs to operate, it offered an exclusive opportunity to French entrepreneurs and a conduit of travel for passengers and colonial troops.

The Sài Gòn - Mỹ Tho Railroad and the steamer service that continued the journey into the delta were technically and financially successful ventures. The Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes et Fluviales operated 120-ton and 400-ton steamers on a regular schedule to deliver mail and goods to all towns in the delta and upriver in Cambodia. The steamers also came from a steel yard in Paris—9 Rue Bergière. Fabrication for these occurred just blocks from the yard where workers prepared the steel segments on Eiffel's bridges.[20] These imported operations linked the colonial métropole more closely with the French métropole and its public by introducing these fabrications into the countryside. They successfully replaced the old system of water transportation, though without modifying the environment to the extent of new canals.

[20] Gouvernement du Cochinchine, "Contrat du Avril 29, 1886," *Contrats Pour le Service Postal des Correspondances Fluviales de la Cochinchine et du Cambodge* (1901), 35. See 8°/3811(3), Trung Tâm Thông Tin Khoa Học Xã Hội, Hà Nội.

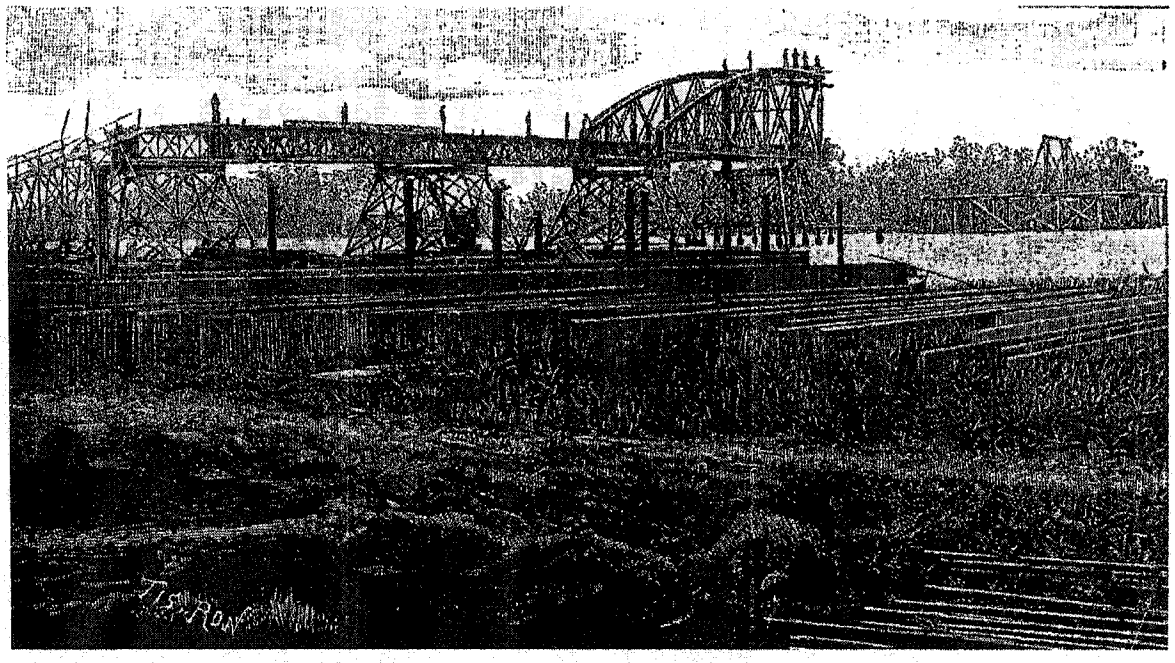


Figure 2.4: Tân An Rail Bridge Construction, 1882. Source: R. Gentilini. *Les Voies de Communication en Cochinchine*. Paris: Imprimerie Chaix | 20 Rue Bergère (1886).

With this rail link finished, Mỹ Tho finally emerged as an urban extension of the métropole along the banks of the Mekong River. A 1907 advertisement described it as the point for embarkation:

> From this point radiate many lines of steamers, penetrating the heart of the richest provinces of Cochinchina and heading upwards to Cambodia and the Upper River. On the famous Chờ Gạo Canal, thousands of junks and longboats relay all of the riches of the delta and the Mekong Valley to Saigon and Cholon...the canal ends three kilometers from My Tho. The European town is built along the Arroyo de la Poste, another canal that links the Mekong with the capital; but modern river traffic [to Saigon] has been abandoned because of narrow confines.[21]

[21] "Notes Descriptifs," *Messageries Fluviales de Cochinchine*. Paris (1908), 22. See 8°/3811(4), Trung Tâm Thông Tin Khoa Học Xã Hội, Hà Nội. "De ce point rayonnent de nombreuses legnes de vapeurs, pénétrant au couer des plus riches provinces de Cochinchine ou montant vers le Cambodge et le Haut-Fleuve. Le fameux canal de Chogao, par où transitent sur des milliers de jonques et de chaloupes, pour se rendre à Saigon et à Cholon, toutes les richesses des deltas de Cochinchine et de la vallée du Mékong, aboutit à trois kilometres en aval de Mytho; la ville européene est

The railroad succeeded in removing colonial bodies and goods from the narrow confines of the waterways, allowing them to travel quickly past the junks and longboats to a river landing where steamers waited to carry them through the wide main branches of the Mekong. This opposition between narrow, confining spaces and wide-open ways was a fundamental distinction between colonial and indigenous space. It was borne out of initial concerns for defense that permeated public works constructions. Navigational routes like modern "European towns" and *métropoles* required sufficient clearance away from the local obstructions of indigenous life. Still, the colonial government depended on the "thousands of junks and longboats" relaying its commerce; its source of riches depended on a localized agricultural commerce.

A Mechanized Return to Hydraulic Work

Although the colony had postponed new waterways after 1880, Thévenet and Renaud continued to study *dôs d'âne*. They sought a *permanent* solution through additional modifications to the canals. They calculated the known velocity of water flow and dimensions of the canal to determine where flushing basins (*bassin de chasse*) could relieve the "dead points" and provide exit routes for stagnant water. Thévenet believed it would be possible to maintain continuous movement of water in all parts of the main

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construite au confluent de l'Arroyo de la Poste, qui fait aussi communiquer le Mékong avec la capitale, mais que le trafic fluvial moderne a presque abandonné à cause de son exiguïté."

canal despite the fluctuation of the tides. Using the "language of exact science par excellence", as Pouyanne observed, he touted this innovation as "the fundamental theorem for the establishment of [permanent] canals in Cochinchina."[22]

The government refused to fund these experiments for ten more years until a new Chief Engineer, Gubiand, returned to Chờ Gạo. Labor crews dug a short basin connecting a natural creek, Rạch Ông Vân, to Chờ Gạo (Figure 2.5). Results were good; the flushing basin prevented the dôs d'âne. Gubiand sent another crew to build a diversionary structure on the Saintard Canal near Sóc Trang and also reported good results to the Council. The breakthrough, however, did not immediately translate into a new dredging program. Just a few years after completion of the flushing basin at Saintard, local people cut through dams (*barrages*) on adjacent creeks to let water back to their fields. Within a few months, the dôs d'âne returned. Expansions of the Chờ Gạo Canal later in 1897 ruined the flushing basin there, too.[23]

[22] *Voies d'Eau*, 39.
[23] *Voies d'Eau*, 41.

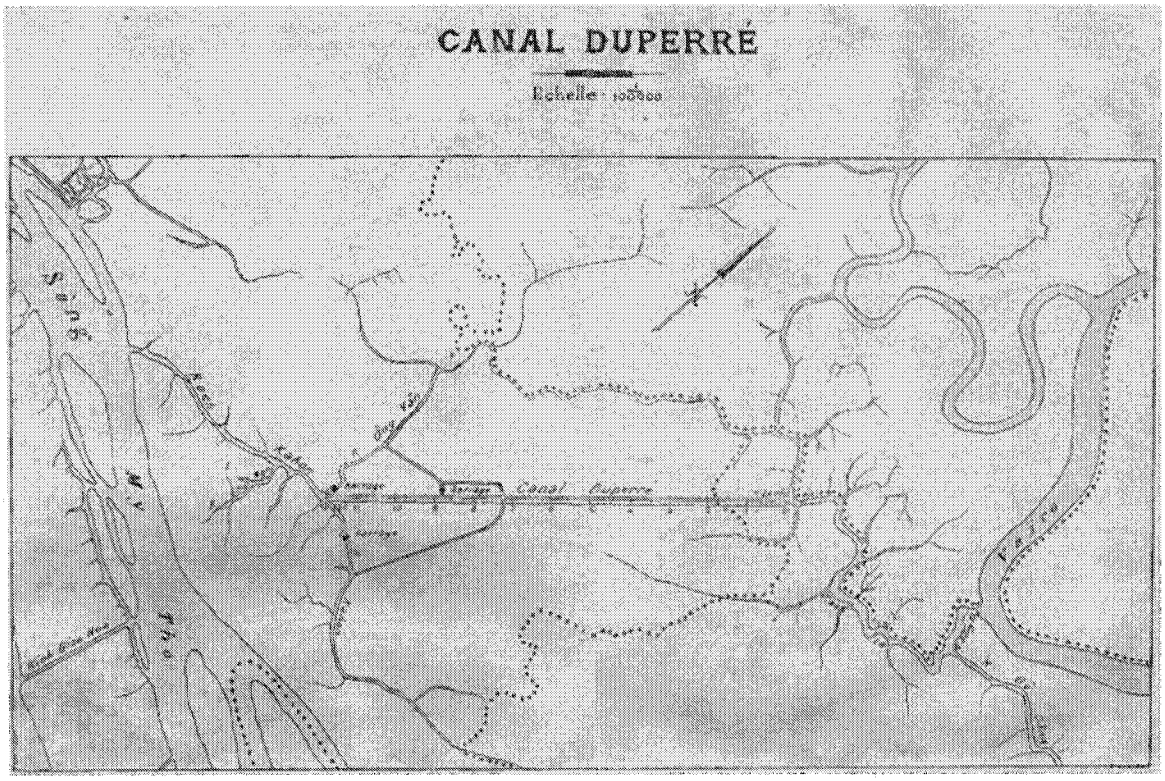


Figure 2.5: Flushing Basins on the Duperré [Chờ Gạo] Canal. The first of several modifications to this canal was the short channel connecting Rạch Ông Vân to the main canal in 1891. After the canal was widened in 1897, the changed volumes of flow resulted in the formation of dôs d'âne at other points. In 1905, public works engineers attempted to build new flushing basins on both sides of the canal, but they were ultimately abandoned. The canal was alternately called Duperré after the admiral in charge of the waterway's original construction in 1875. Source: Pouyanne. *Les Voies d'Eau de la Cochinchina: Atlas* (1911), Plate 14a.

The most important factor in the government's return to waterways was the development of steam dredging. The use of dredging machines fit the needs of the colonial state and its supporters in France to develop an enterprise that was uniquely French in the manner of Eiffel bridges and railroads. By investing money into this enterprise, the colonial government was supporting French businesses, mechanics and engineers. In 1893, the administration announced the 10-year contract for bids in Paris. The 12-million franc contract required the enterprise to increase its monthly volumes of

earth dredged and gradually reduce its rates. Payment was based on successful completion of specified depths and widths of the canals; the government paid in increments according to volume. The 1893 contract stipulated that for the first six months, the enterprise would dredge 60,000 cubic meters each month. From months six to twenty-five, it would double that requirement to 120,000 cubic meters. Finally, from the twenty-fifth month to the end of the ten-year period, the enterprise would have to dredge 220,000 cubic meters per month.[24]

Montvenoux, a dredging firm in the Loire Valley, was the only firm to respond. In 1894, company members set up an office in Sài Gòn and a year later, they had received and assembled three steam-powered dredges simply named *I, II, and III* . Each dredge relied on a circulating chain of steel scoops (*chaine à godets*) to continuously scour the bottom of the channel. Once full, the scoops rose along a diagonal arm until they emptied a slurry of mud and water onto booms that carried the silt to banks running parallel to the channel. Once operating fully, the two 300 hp machines dredged 90,000 cubic meters per month; the third 250 hp dredged 50,000 cubic meters. All required a small crew of hired laborers to clear stumps and debris in front of it (Figure 2.6).[25] The firm was also required to supply a private cabin on board for a member of Public Works, someone who would verify the reports of daily and monthly volumes.

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[24] "Ajudication de Travaux de Dragages a Effectuer en Cochinchine pour L'Amelioration du Réseau des Voies de Navigation Intérieure," 17 January, 1893, TTLTQG2, Fonds Goucoch IA 19/174.

The colony's return to canal work was based on the ability of the dredges to simultaneously replace local labor and produce observable metrics of their work. Dredges were indispensable as instruments of exploration in the swampy frontiers beyond Mỹ Tho and the eastern provinces. By comparison, workers on average dug about three cubic meters of earth per day. A monthly goal of 90,000 cubic meters would require 1000 persons working continuously. It was not politically or economically feasible to maintain so many laborers. In the western delta, the population density at the time was roughly twenty-five persons per square kilometer. Once functioning efficiently, dredges helped their European captains avoid working among an army of laborers on the canal bank. Instead, sitting high atop the dredge, French engineers and captains could ride across the landscape far above the workers on the ground. It was only with this kind of distancing instrument that the idea of constructing a water network became acceptable to those Europeans who might be willing to work on the machine.

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[25] *Voies d'Eau*, 70.

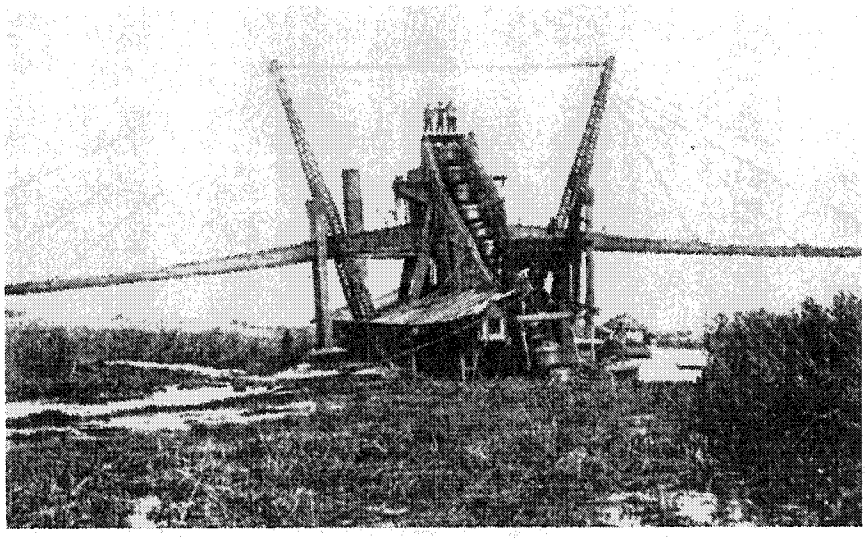


Figure 2.6: Dredge "II". Source: GGI. *Dragages du Cochinchine: Canal Rachgia-Hatien* (1930) p. 29. Standing atop the dredge at a height of some 20 meters are the three Europeans in charge of the project: the Public Works attendant, the dredge operator, and the chief mechanic.

During the first years, work went slowly with half the funds going to human labor hired to finish projects while the machines were stuck in disrepair waiting for spare parts. In 1895 near Chợ Lớn, one crew with a malfunctioning machine and several hundred workers dredged just 219,952 cubic meters of earth (18,000 cubic meters per month compared to a required 60,000). The majority of expenses were for humans—workers, overseers, and guards. Maintenance of the machinery cost some 20,000 francs, including 2,000 spent on charcoal fuel for the boilers.[26] During the first years of operation, the utility of mechanical dredges appeared to repeat the utility of past hydraulic projects—works that might become undone before they were even finished.

[26] "Travaux de Dragages en Régie," August 1894, TTLTQG2, Fonds Goucoch IA 19/174.

The government's handling of the dredging program changed significantly during the administration of Governor-General Paul Doumer from 1898-1902. Doumer assumed tighter control over projects in Cochinchina and emphasized the importance of provincial *administrateurs* and councils supplying funds and direction for what he considered essentially local projects. The provincial administrators were to propose projects while the state concentrated on larger, inter-regional constructions. In November 1900, Doumer issued a decision to reorganize Public Works, including the contract with the dredging enterprise. Responding to these actions, Montvenoux soon brought its costs and volumes to those stipulated in the contract.[27] Records are not clear whether this was more the result of legal pressure from Doumer or technical improvements in the machinery. What is clear is that through the reorganization of provincial councils and provincial planning, Public Works quickly became an ally for provincial councils anxious to develop new territory and expand revenues.

The reorganization of Public Works and the dredging process aligned common interests between administrators, influential landowners, engineers, and the dredging firm—even small landholders and villagers supported the idea of dredging as a potential improvement of the land for farming. The reorganization of dredging under Doumer also resulted in a periodic *procès verbal* where provincial administrators and engineers gathered in Sài Gòn with the Governor and members of the Colonial Council to

[27] "Etat au 31 Décembre 1902 des travaux exécutés par l'entreprise de dragages Montvenoux et Cie," December 1902, TTLTQG2, Fonds Goucoch IA 19/164.

consider both regional and local infrastructure needs in all of Cochinchina. This periodic meeting founded the idea of a regional water network rather than so many individual projects..[28]

In 1904, the government signed a new contract with a new firm that absorbed the old dredges from Montvenoux and added two new machines, the *Nantes* and *Loire*. The Société Française Industrielle d'Extrême-Orient followed a new contract until 1913. Members from this company then formed the Société Française d'Entreprises de Dragages et de Travaux Publics that continued work until 1926. This firm re-signed a contract for 1929 to 1936, but operations slowed after the financial collapse of 1930.[29] With this newly formed alliance of men and machines in 1903, Public Works was not only able to maintain and expand older waterways such as Chờ Gạo but it was able to rapidly expand the waterway network into the lower region of the Delta below the Hậu Giang Branch of the Mekong and the immense Plain of Reeds.

The scene of the towering dredges moving at a snail's pace through mangroves and floodplains soon became common even in the once remote areas where rebels had continued to threaten French troops in the 1870's. Besides the towering machine, the operation also involved a crew of hired workers and technicians who made the projects

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[28] *Les Voies d'Eau*, 70.
[29] Service des Travaux Publics, "Dragages dans les Canaux de Cochinchine," 1939, TTLTQG2, Fonds Goucoch VI-A8/186(31).

their home for months on end. The list of persons operating one dredge in 1906 included the following:

1 European Project Chief
1 European Dredge Captain
1 European Mechanic
4 Front Guards
4 Dredge Guards
39 Front Laborers
27 Dredge Laborers
10 Rear Laborers
5 Public Works Laborers[30]

Each day, work on this project lasted for 19 hours, except on Sundays and during repairs. One group of laborers cleared stumps and brush in front while another worked alongside the machine on the newly formed banks. Historian Sơn Nam, recalling local stories of the dredges, described scenes of people following the dredge looking for pieces of gold and finding only bones. Laborers were responsible for their own quarters and spent their free time playing cards, drinking, and hunting game in the forests beyond the project site. The crews were notorious for accepting bribes from landowners in return for not burying their houses and orchards in mountains of clay when the dredge passed. On an average day, the dredge moved about 160 meters.[31]

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[30] Chantier du Canal Bassac Cailon, "Bulletin Hebdomadaire du 26 Avril au 2 Mai 1908," TTLTQG2, Fonds Goucoch IA 13/236(1).
[31] Sơn Nam. *Lịch Sử Khẩn Hoang Miền Nam*, 272.

While there are daily records quantifying the volumes dredged and describing the average movements and costs of the operation, there are very few details of social life on the projects. A crew of 85 men steered a clanking, towering machine through swamps and farms by day and night. One incident recorded on the Lai Hiếu project in 1908 involved a fight between a European mechanic, Musquiere, and a Vietnamese foreman in charge of embankment works, Trần Công Võ. Musquiere had a local girlfriend, Khen, who was on good terms with Võ's wife. Through some dispute between the two women, Khen proceeded to fight with Mr. Võ. Her teenage son then challenged Võ to a fight while Khen fled to the dredge and hid with Musquiere. Upset by this, Musquiere then threatened Mr. Võ, raising a club against him. Võ responded by drawing a knife on Musquiere. Alarmed village leaders intervened, and the matter resulted in an investigation with Public Works and the provincial court. The Chief of Public Works in Sài Gòn wrote to the province administrator who was anxious about anti-French sentiment.[32] The Chief Engineer threatened immediate dismissal and punishment in the future for all French and Vietnamese who became involved with "con gái" [local girls] while working on projects. This mixing of dredging crews with local women represented one of the most intimate forms of localization for colonial workers—the social entanglements that sometimes resulted threatened to slow down operations and thus slow down colonial constructions. The Chief Engineer's response was part of the same urban logic that understood the rural landscape as a blank space—

[32] Administrator of Can Tho to Chief Engineer of Public Works, 19 February 1908, TTLTQG2, Fonds Goucoch. IA/13/236(3).

either wilderness or rice paddy—lying between Sài Gòn and the provinces. It was not the kind of space they themselves ever intended to inhabit, only a support for colonial infrastructure.

As the budget and operations of the Public Works programs continued to grow after 1900, engineers returned to Chờ Gạo and its perpetually silted basin. Albert Pouyanne, one of the most active students of delta hydrology, designed new flushing basins in 1905. Working with a smaller, new dredge, his crew widened the canal's channel and added two new flushing basins to stabilize the work and prove Thévenet's theorem (Figure 2.5).[33] The larger creek used in this version, Rạch Kahon, provided sufficient drainage to keep the main channel clear, but the construction caused new *dôs d'âne* to form at the mouth of the canal, blocking navigation there. Pouyanne abandoned future modifications; nevertheless, he still defended Thévenet's invention and his employment of it as a success in principal:

> The accretion noted at the end of the Kahon side is due to special circumstances: the presence of an old *rạch* is adding additional sediment; the movements caused by the currents of Kahon and the canal have thus combined. It will be necessary to make more attempts with this part of the canal to give it final form. But from the point of view of maintaining commerce in the channel by the constitution of flushing basins emerging at the point of meeting of the tidal surges, the results obtained with Duperré Canal [Chờ Gạo] are absolutely satisfactory... we can regard it as having currently its final form.[34]

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[33] Direction Générale des Travaux Publics, Gouvernement Générale de l'Indochine, *Atlas: Les Voies d'Eau de la Cochinchine* (Saigon: Imprimerie Nouvelle, 1911), Pl. XIV.

After multiple attempts at Chờ Gạo, the "final form" still eluded engineers. The natural, hydrologic force of the river and tides continued to undo their work.

Local Conflicts on the Water Network

The Public Works Department began to rapidly extend new waterways into the lower regions of the Delta in 1898 with construction in the Đồng Tháp Floodplain or Plain of Reeds and then with a series of constructions around Cần Thơ and Phụng Hiệp (Figure 2.7). This first resulted in the expansion of waterways westward from Mỹ Tho into the inundated Plain of Reeds or Đồng Tháp. Tổng Độc Lộc, the provincial governor who sided with the French against various rebel groups in the late 1860's and early 1870's, received a large concession of land for his service and then organized labor crews to dredge a canal named after him in the 1880's. Local *administrateurs* added additional waterways during their tenure that took their name as well—Canals Lagrange and Lacombe. When heavy monsoon floods hit the region for four consecutive years from 1904 to 1907, most new tenants and colons left permanently. New settlers and tenants arrived in 1911; but within a year, they also abandoned the area.

Ponts et Chausées engineer A. Normandin recorded the desolation in Đồng Tháp in 1912. On the Arroyo Commercial, water was a dark brown color from toxic levels of alum (iron and aluminum silicates). Only the junctions of canal embankments (such as

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[34] *Les Voies d'Eau*, 44.

at Tháp Mười and Cái Bè) survived the floods. They stood just a few meters above the water, small red-earth islands densely planted in rows of banana, sweet potatoes, corn and sugar. Along the eastern reach of the Lagrange Canal near Mỹ Tho, farmers lived in scattered thatch huts; westward into the heart of Đồng Tháp was an "absolute desert". The evacuees packed up their valuables into small boats and left their homes to disintegrate in the flood.[35]

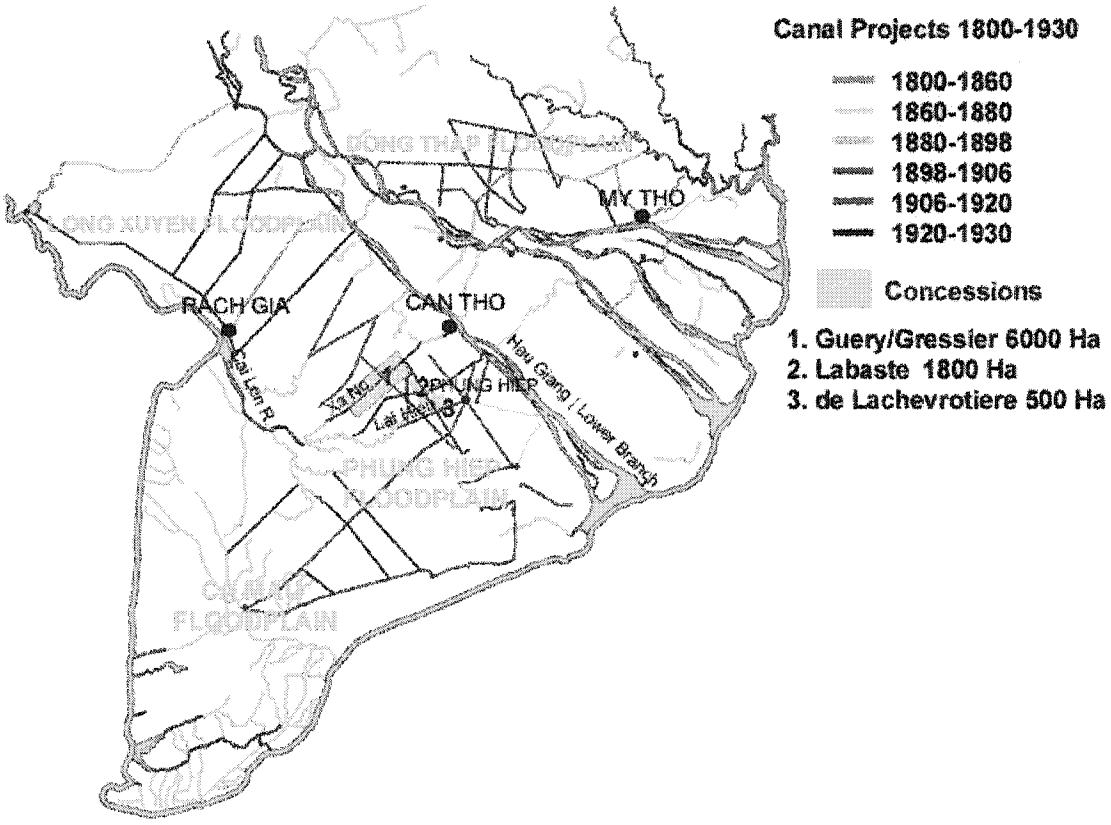


Figure 2.7: Major Canal Projects to 1930. This diagram shows a general schematic of major canal projects to 1930. There was a regional shift in focus from the Đồng Tháp Floodplain to the Phụng Hiệp

[35] A. Normandin, *Travaux d'Hydraulique Agricole à étudier et à entreprendre en Cochinchine* (Saigon: Imprimerie Commerciale M. Rey, 1913), 32.

Floodplain by 1904 and to the Long Xuyên Floodplain in about 1916. This was due to land abandonments and political instability in Đồng Tháp after floods destroyed crops in 1904 and increasing migration to the Long Xuyên region after 1915. Some of the largest colonial plantations were located near Phụng Hiệp. Only a few projects crossed the region between the two main branches of the Mekong; this was the most densely populated and historically settled portion of the delta. The presence of many small creeks and arroyos supported agricultural yields that were often double that of average yields. Source: Author. Approximate areas for the concessions are based on archival notes from a court case involving Henri de Lachevrotiere (Source: TTLTQG2, Fonds Goucoch IB25/124) and a 1911 survey of the Xà No Canal describing Guéry's concession along 14 km of canal and extending roughly 2 km from each bank (Source: Service Geographique de l'Indochine. "Ligne de Cantho au Nga Ba Dinh," Répertoire des Réperes de Nivellement de la Cochinchine (1911).) A map published in 1925 describes Labaste's concession as 1800 Ha (Source: Gouvernement de Cochinchine. *Plan Topographique de la Province de Cantho 1/100.000* – 1925).

The hydraulic and economic failures in Đồng Tháp, however, did not deter the Public Works campaigns—instead, the alliance of engineers and their supporters moved the locus of efforts to Phụng Hiệp further south. The lower delta, called "Transbassac," differed significantly from the region around Mỹ Tho and Sài Gòn. Also known generally as "the West" (*Miền Tây*) by Vietnamese settlers, the area was largely covered by forests before 1900.[36] Such flooded forests and swamps harbored rebels even after the cession of the provinces to France in 1867. At Láng Hầm Village in 1868, Đinh Sâm led one band of insurgents to kill a canton chief who had cooperated with the French. Colonial Vietnamese troops under the command of "Governor" Lộc chased down the rebels and killed Đinh Sâm.[37]

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[36] Vietnamese author Sơn Nam, familiar with American westerns showing in Sài Gòn cinemas in the 1950's, compares Vietnamese expansion into the area with Euro-American expansion into the American West. Sơn Nam, *Đồng Bằng Sông Cửu Long*, 15.

[37] Société des Études Indo-Chinoises, *Géographie Physique, Économique et Historique de la Cochinchine, Xe Fascicule: Monographie de la Province de Cần – Tho* (Saigon: Imprimerie Ménard & Rey, 1904), 28. Lộc was a former mandarin who sided with the French and in return received vast tracts of land in the Đồng Tháp region.

Three years later, French surveyors recorded some of the first journeys through the region starting from a Khmer village called Vị Thủy on the Cái Lớn River:

> [October 1871] More than 60 miles from the Rach-gia estuary, we arrived on the 26th at eight o'clock in the evening. At midnight we returned to the Khmer village of Vi-thuy, where I prepared 15 *xuồng* [wooden longboats]... the dugout becomes thus a species of broad shoe, slipping with speed on cut or curved grasses. Enough broad packages of rebel grasses form often, causing interruptions where it is necessary to carry the dugout by hand, through what can be called a *trập* [pit]... Leaving the rice plantations of Vi-thuy, we traveled north until around ten in the morning, the moment when we emerged at the *ngon* [creek] Cai-Cao, a vast plain from where branches out the *Nước - đôc*: It is the meeting place of many wild buffaloes, so we took precautions not to surprise them.[38]

The group traveled four hours across a flooded plain sowed in floating rice (called *lúa ma* or "phantom rice" because it required only broadcasting of seeds and no transplanting). Lt. Benoist remarked that the wetlands might "sustain the existence of some Robin Hood, but not more than a small number." They traveled north to Phụng Hiệp along a well-known way where elephants had once trampled a path in the dry season.[39] (Figure 2.7)

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[38] Brière, "Exploration par M. Benoist de la Partie Déserte Comprise Entre les Inspections de Rach-gia, Cantho et Long-xuyen (Novembre 1871)," *Excursions et Reconnaissances* No. 1 (1879), 44.
"...à plus de 60 milles de l'estuaire du Rach-gia, où j'arrivai le 26 à huit heures de soir. A minuit nous étions rendus au village cambodgien de Vi-thuy, où j'avais fait préparer 15 *xuống*...La pirogue devient ainsi une espéce de large patin, glissant avec rapidité sur les herbes coupées ou courbées. Assez souvent de larges paquets d'herbes rebelles formant, couchées, de véritables barrages sur lesquels il faut porter à bras la pirogue, et qu'on appele *trập* [pit]...En quittant les rizières de Vi-thuy, nous faisons route au nord jusque vers dix heures du matin, moment auquel nous débouchons dans le *ngôn* Cai-cao, vaste plaine d'où sort un bras de *Nươc - đôc*, le Cai-cao: c'est le rendez-vous de nombreux buffles sauvages, que nous nous sommes donnés garde d'inquiéter."
[39] Ibid., 46.

Even today, farmers know some older roads as "elephant road" [*đường tượng*]. Ông Mười in Cây Dương Town recalled the establishment of his village and the location of the Lai Hiếu Canal (Figure 2.7) along one:

> There was cajuput [malaleuca cajeputi] forest everywhere here; this road (outside here) was [originally] made by elephants. Because of that, our ancestors came here to clear land and founded the village...by [having] a road, they could attract settlers. When they dug the canal [Lai Hiếu], people came from every direction, they could go anywhere and settle...so that instantly [after work on the canal] there were settlers, steadily getting more crowded, establishing villages and hamlets.[40]

Explorers like Benoist depended on these existing paths and their guides to carry them through the marshes. Like Vietnamese settlers who first followed the paths of elephants before them, the colonial survey followed the familiar paths of local people.

Once mechanical dredging began in these settlements, it had a rapid effect on the surrounding forests. By 1906, even central government officials were alarmed at the rate of trees being cut in the Transbassac. Their concern at the time was not that cutting was degrading the environment but that timber was being misclassified and the colony was losing tax revenues. Estimated sales in 1902 were 2.5 million cubic meters. Malaleuca, a freshwater mangrove species used as a rot-resistant pier timber and for making charcoal, was taxed at .60 piasters per cubic meter while brushwood was taxed

[40] Ông Mười, Interview One, April 12, 2002 [038]. "Rừng tràm hết trơn, đây là đường tượng đi. Thành ra Ông Bà mình khai ấp này...vừa khai mở đường đưa dân cư về đây. Khi khai kinh này, có dân tứ xứ, tha phương cầu thực, đến cùng khai hoang lập ấp...thành ra mới có dân cư, dần dần mới đông, lập làng lập xóm..."

at .10. A 20-year stand of malaleuca might total 500 cubic meters in a hectare; at a rate of 2.5 million cubic meters cut per year, approximately 5000 hectares were lost each year to cutting. The actual amount was probably much higher, accounting for fires and land clearing. Stands of dipterocarps and hardwoods located on the slight hills quickly disappeared to supply construction and furniture needs in the towns. In one year alone, a contractor supplied Cần Thơ Province with 25,000 sections of the hardwood species called cây cồng. Cây cồng trees on average were 9 meters in height and rose high above twisted canopies of mangroves.[41] By 1910, Cần Thơ Province was completely cleared.

Public Works moved its dredges to the Transbassac in 1901. The Xà No Canal, linking Cần Thơ with Rạch Giá on the Gulf Coast, was the first major project.[42] It began as a provincial project requested in 1898 by the administrators of Rạch Giá and Cần Thơ. Their idea for the project was to conduct fresh water across 10,000 hectares of forests and brackish swamps to the Cái Lớn River and Gulf Coast (Figure 2.8). Like Chờ Gạo, it linked two separate watersheds. Xà No Creek (top/north-east) emptied into the Cần Thơ River and the lower branch of the Mekong (Hậu Giang or "Bassac"). The southwest terminus of the canal ended at Cái Tư Creek, a tributary of the Cái Lớn River that emptied into the Gulf of Thailand. This canal was one of the few that successfully

[41] "Nombre de stères de bois a bruler vérifies... ," 5 March 1904, TTLTQG2, Fonds Goucoch IA13/308(12). Today in the region, almost all trees in uncultivated areas are plantations of malaleuca or eucalyptus (an exotic introduced from Australia after 1975).

[42] The canal was named after a local name for a creek. Recent archaeological surveys have uncovered jars, housing posts and jewelry from the 3rd century CE.

flushed saltwater from Cái Lớn and maintained a steady current. The black line running across the map represents the provincial boundary between Cần Thơ and Rạch Giá.

In anticipation of its completion, the Rạch Giá administrator then retired from the Service and acquired a land concession of almost 6,000 hectares along 14 kilometers of the canal. He could not claim all of the land along the canal because land adjacent to the original creeks had been farmed since the Nguyễn survey of 1836. Population along the original Xà No Creek was the densest anywhere in the Transbassac. The canton (*tổng*) surrounding Xà No Canal included eight major villages that had been listed since the Nguyễn land surveys in 1836. By 1902 the canton had a total population of 41,140. Nhơn Ái, the village bisected by one end of the canal, had a population of 10,464 persons. This exceeded the population of the colonial provincial capital by almost 2,000 persons.[43]

[43] Société des Etudes Indo-Chinoises, *Monographie de la Province de Cân-Thơ*, 11. Cantons (*tổng*) were roughly equivalent in area to counties in the U.S. or districts (*huyện*) in Việt Nam today. A village (*làng*) was the smallest administrative unit located within a canton.

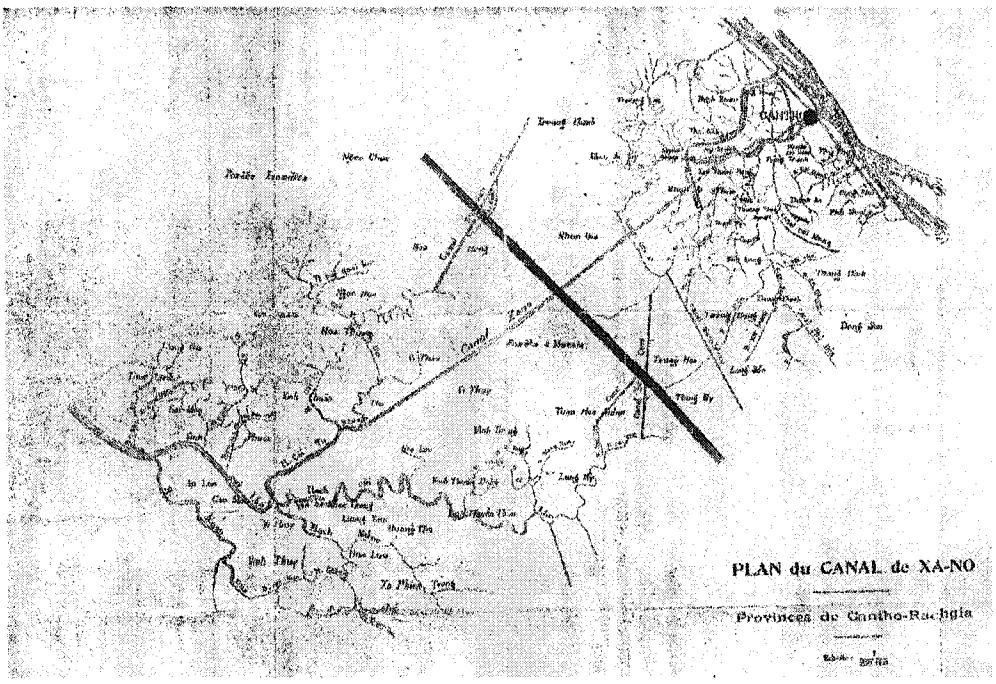


Figure 2.8: Xà No Canal Map: Xà No was one of the first "transverse" canals in the lower delta, completed in 1904. Source: Gouvernement du Cochinchine. "Plan du Canal du Xano". Saigon: Imprimerie Commerciale (1904). TTLTQG2. Fonds Goucoch. IA 13/232(1).

When the dredge passed through Nhơn Ái in its route to Cái Lớn, it left parallel walls of clay on either side of the canal. These embankments completely blocked the flow of creeks and the irrigation ditches connected to them. During the floods that followed in the summer, land on one side of the canal was submerged under water a meter deep. During the long dry season, land on the other side suffered from water shortages.

This situation in one of the most populous Vietnamese villages in the Transbassac triggered a complicated dispute over indemnities that eventually reached the Governor

General in Hanoi. The details of this dispute illustrate the tangled web of interests and conflicts that linked engineers, bureaucrats, local farmers, and French concessionaires on the waterways. The cause for alarm here was that local farmers and the wealthy concessionaire both attempted to modify the canal. To the Chief Engineer in Sài Gòn and other bureaucrats, this threatened the stability of the entire web.

In May 1901, the leaders of Nhơn Nghĩa village wrote to the Cần Thơ Administrator complaining about the effects of the canal on their fields and waterworks. A village leader [*hương chủ*] named Ân asked permission from a Public Works clerk, Claveril, to dig a small opening in one embankment of the new canal to supply the village's irrigation network with water:

> ...Since this part has been dug, there has been no drinkable water; we have had to drink water from the swamps, for three months already. Now the dredge has left, completed one section already, so now my Village petitions the Administrator...please allow me to gather 50 men, to make an opening where the dredge had filled, just five days work...if we don't open this back up, our rice fields will be flooded, killing everything, and afterwards we'll have to find water at a different place.[44]

A Public Works clerk living on the canal between the village and the new home of the Rạch Giá administrator received the letter. On behalf of the Department, he allowed the

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[44] Nhơn Nghĩa Village Council Head, Định Bảo Canton, May 1901, TTLTQG2, Fonds Goucoch IA 13/232(1). "Vậy nên ngăn đắng thì đạo không nước mà ướng, uống những nước bung mà chịu, là 3 tháng rồi, nay xán[g] múc qua khỏi xa, đã phóng thị một khúc rồi, vậy nay Làng chúng tôi đều trăm lạy Quan lớn, xin ra ơn trát cho Làng tôi xin 50 tên dân, đặng khai chỗ đất, xán[g] múc đổ lấp đó 5 ngày rồi, như không khai ra thì đường thì đạo ngăn lấp, gieo mạ không đặng, làm ruộng thì lúa ngập nước chết hết sau chúng tôi đều đái khác."

villagers to make a small cut along one side of the canal embankment so that water from the canal would irrigate their fields. The affair briefly ended at that point, with villages maintaining the old water works to the extent it did not interfere with water conditions on the new canal. However, after finishing the work, Chấn (the largest landholder who had paid workers to reconnect the old works) petitioned the Định Bão canton head to arrange for some reimbursement to cover his labor costs and lost crops. Chấn wrote:

> I live here, where the dredge has crossed Mương Khai Creek. Mine is a tile-roof house, and along the creek are 30 thatch houses; we no longer have a waterway for exiting the area, and when it rains the water floods our houses...because the water doesn't flow, it's making everything dirty and surely spreading many diseases.[45]

In response to these claims for compensation, the administrator of Cần Thơ passed the issue on to the Lieutenant – Governor of Cochinchina, Picanon, who approved a repayment of 4,176 piasters to the farmers.[46]

The Chief Engineer, however, refused to accept this decision and petitioned the Governor-General in Hanoi. The engineers were furious that the welfare of 30 farmers might jeopardize the stability of the entire project—putting an investment of several

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[45] Nguyễn Ngọc Chấn to Chief of Định Bão District, 12 June 1901, TTLTQG2, Fonds Goucoch IA 13/232(1). "Nạy xán lấp cái Rạch Mương Khai chỗ tôi ở, nhà tôi là nhà ngói còn trong Rạch Mương Khai thì có 30 cái nhà lá, không có đường nước nào thông thương ra ngoài rạch lớn đặng, và khi trời mưa thì nước nó tràn vô nhà chúng tôi cả thấp. Còn sự nước không chãy đặng thì việc nhơ huế nhiều, chắc là sanh ra sù dịch khí lắm..."

[46] Lt. Gov Picanon to Administrator of Cantho, 25 July 1901, TTLTQG2. Fonds Goucoch IA 13/232(1). In this list of damages, the letter describe average statistics for rice harvests and land at the time: 1 hectare cost 60 piasters, one hectare produced roughly 90 gia (2700 kg) of rice. 3000 kg of paddy cost 50 piasters. For orchard land, one hectare was worth 200 piasters.

million francs at risk. Governor-General Doumer replied to the Governor who relayed the message on that property fronting the new canal provided new commercial opportunities that outweighed damage caused to lost crops. In other words, commerce was more precious than agriculture. A year later, in December 1902, the new Governor-General, Paul Beau issued a new edict that was in some sense a compromise: it reimbursed farmers for lost fruit trees. He refused however to allow indemnities for damages to village irrigation or lost agricultural productivity.[47]

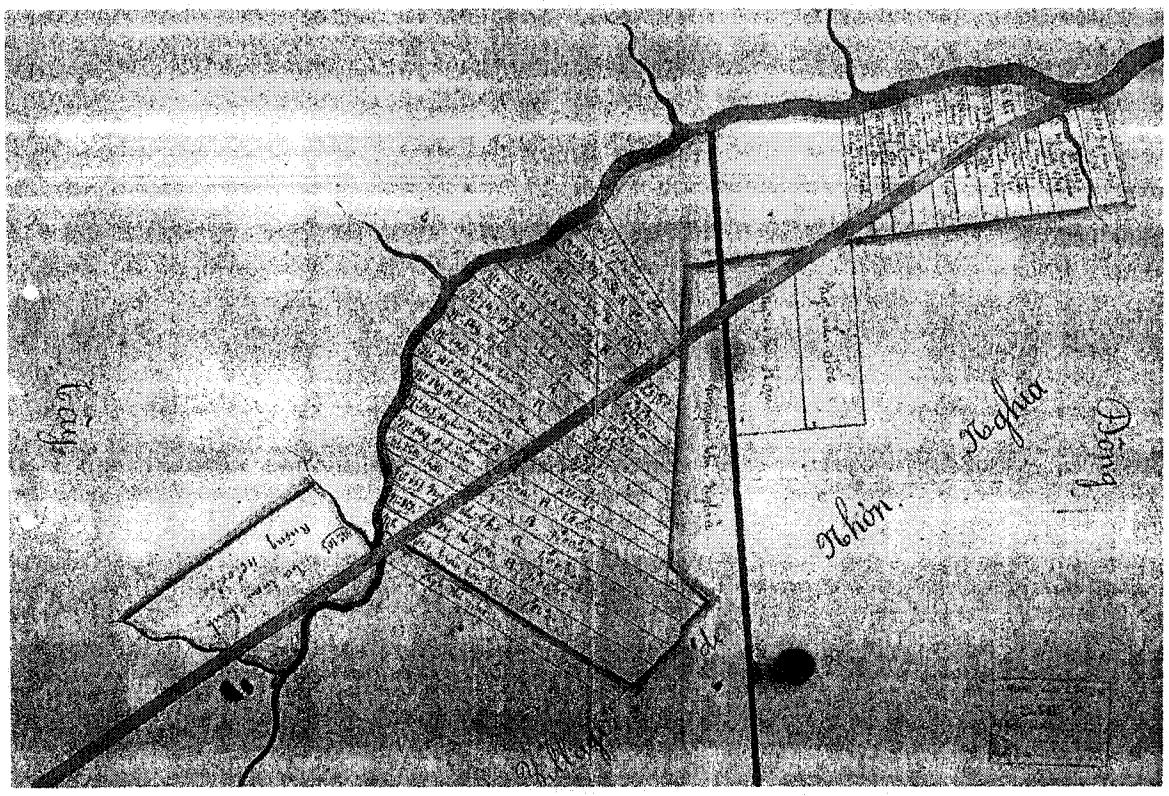


Figure 2.9: Local Land Parcels and Mương Khai Ditch on Xà No Creek. This plan accompanied letters from the village leaders of Nhơn Nghĩa (adjacent to Nhơn Ái Village at the northern terminus of Xà No Canal). The canal split the parcels into two, disrupting the existing irrigation to each parcel. Mương

[47] Decision 3378 of Governor-General, 31 December 1902, TTLTQG2, Fonds Goucoch IA 13/232(1).

Khai Ditch is pictured here as a thick black line running from top to bottom of the figure. Source: 27 September 1901. Nhơn Ái Village. TTLTQG2. Fonds Goucoch. IA 13/232(1).

These local conflicts on southern canals occasionally attracted the attention of Sài Gòn newspapers. In 1907, Gilbert Chiếu, an advocate for Vietnamese modernization and a regular contributor to the newspaper *Nông-cổ Mín-đàm*, described "une bataille intéressante" on the barrages of the Cái Bè river, a tributary of Cái Lớn cut off by the Thôt Nôt Canal:

> On the banks of Cái Bè a scene most typical has happened. Immense rice paddy is crossed by a canal and dam, [paddy that] was in active cultivation. Crack! The floods arrived, and all the part north of the canal was flooded by the masses of water stopped by the dam. As the water went up, the owners of the southern part raised the dam to protect against the water to come. Owners of the northern part destroyed this work of their friends to save their crops. Some built, rebuilt, the others destroyed until coming to blows over it. The affair is now in the hands of the Administrator and the Procurer of the Republic.[48]

Chiếu's suggestion was to build a canal further north that would protect these lands from floods.[49] He was not opposed to construction of new canals, just the manner of their location. This distinction is important; there was no indication that local farmers

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[48] Gilbert Chiếu, "Une Bataille Intéressante," *Supplement du Nông-Cổ Mín-Đàm*, October 23, 1907, 1. "Dans les barrages de Caibè il vient de se passer une scêne des plus typiques. Des rizières immenses traversées par un canal et une digue, se cultivaient activement. Crac! L'innondation arriva, toute la partie Nord du canal fut inondée de la masse d'eau arrêtée par la digue. A mesure que l'eau montait, les propriétaires de la partie Sud exhaussèrent la digue pour empécher l'eau de venir. Les propriétaires de la partie Nord détruisment l'œuvre de leurs copains pour saveur leurs cultures. Les uns établissèrent, rétablissèrent, les autres détruisirent et de part et d'autre on s'en vint aux mains. L'affaire est entre les mains de l'Administrateur ou du Procurer de la République."

[49] Gilbert Trần Chanh Chiếu was arrested in 1908 for anti-colonial activities related to the Đông Du (Minh Tâm) Movement. A wealthy landlord, Chiếu was the editor of three native-language newspapers and supported the development of associations to promote foreign studies for young scholars in the Mekong Delta. Besides this activity, he also actively encouraged Vietnamese diversification of assets in attempts to modernize after the model of

were opposed to the dredging—they often supported additional projects in hopes it might drain floods to other areas.

Such conflicts over the canals were not limited to indigenous landholders, either. The Lai Hiếu Canal (1902-1906) crossed several large French concessions and brought floods that wiped out large areas of these lands. Public Works engineers sent the dredge crew to Lai Hiếu during the second major campaign from 1904-1908. Engineers widened Cái Côn Creek to 80 meters, connecting this tributary of the Hậu Giang with the canal intersection at Phụng Hiệp. They ignored warnings that the center of this area was a depression that collected surrounding water. The name Vị Thủy itself means "water belly". In 1906, after openings to the Mekong River were connected to the canal, water quickly flooded the area and drowned the rice fields including properties of Mr. Robert Labaste, Madame Vivienne de Lachevrotière, and small landholders living along the Saintenoy Canal.

Madame de Lachevrotiere, the Vietnamese wife of a French colon who had died leaving her with their one son, challenged the colonial government. Together with her son and their lawyer, they sued the government for 400,000 piasters in lost revenue. Police records for her son, Henri, show that he was born in the colony in 1883 and traveled to France for the first time in 1894 to attend his father's funeral. He stayed with his family

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the Meiji in Japan. For more on the "Gilbert Chiếu Affair" see Sơn Nam, *Lịch Sử Khẩn Hoang Miền Nam*, 276-281 and Pierre Brocheux, *The Mekong Delta*, 140-142.

in France for nine years, studying at Bordeaux; in 1903, just when the dredges began work on Lai Hiếu, he returned to the colony as a young man. A year later, he married and took over formal management of the concession in Sài Gòn.[50] His mother, Madame Vivienne de Lachevrotiere, managed the plantation and lived there as well.[51] During a period of intense floods following more constructions in 1909, Madame Vivienne petitioned the provincial government to allow her to build protective dikes around her fields. The government denied the request for the same reasons as at Xà No.[52] Small farmers on the creeks also complained of flooding. The village headman (*hương chủ*) of Mỹ Phước Village (founded in 1897 when the Saintenoy canal was finished) claimed that inhabitants could not cultivate rice after the changes brought on in 1903 and the arrival of record floods in 1904. Most had abandoned their homes in search of better land elsewhere.[53]

Together with her son Henri, Madame de Lachevrotiere managed more than 500 hectares of land adjacent to the Saintenoy Canal (Figure 2.7). In a 1911 court statement, Henri claimed that the fields had once produced 180 to 200 *gịa* [1 *gịa* ~ 20 kg] per hectare. Saintenoy, a canal dug by hand in 1897 with a width of about 4 meters, first drained the area and opened it up for cultivation. In 1903, the Province initiated some local projects while the Public Works Department dredges began Lai Hiếu. The

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[50] Ville de Saigon, Commisariat Central de la Police, 27 May 1914, TTLTQG2, Fonds Goucoch IB25/124.
[51] Le Gouverneur Generale de l'Indochine à Lt-Gouv de la Cochinchine, Lettre Number 1832, 14 June 1911, TTLTQG2, Fonds Goucoch IB 25/124.
[52] "Un Lachevrotiere Retrospectif," *Tribune Indochinoise*, March 21, 1927, 1.

net effect of these simultaneous projects was a sustained flooding when the rainy season returned in 1903. Combined, the new canals linking the Hậu Giang to the Cái Lớn meant that 246 cubic meters of water from the rivers was pushing into an interior waterway network with a capacity of only 107 cubic meters. Productivity dropped to roughly 50 gia.[54]

A wealthy French *colon,* Robert Labaste, sued the government while resorting to his own technical solutions—diesel water pumps. In 1906, he owned 3,400 hectares of land in the region worth some 30,000 piasters in annual revenue. In 1909, suffering several years of high floods, he spent 18,000 piasters on two 60-horsepower engines to pump water out of his domain. The labor cost for digging the flood dikes and mounting the diesel pumps cost him an additional 167,000 piasters. After this episode, he sold the pumps to the provincial government and recouped 80,000 piasters from their sale along with part of his concession.[55]

State engineers responded to these challenges from French citizens and their lawyers by redirecting the blame to provincial planners. In his response against Henri Lachevrotiere's lawsuit, the Chief Engineer wrote:

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[53] Letter from Mỹ Phước Village Head to Administrator of Cần Thơ, 13 July 1905, TTLTQG2, Fonds Goucoch IA 13/236 (9).
[54] M. Charousset, Avocat Secretaire de M. Thiollier, Avocat-Défenseur à Saigon à M. Le Gouverneur-Generale de l'Indochine, 22 May 1912, TTLTQG2, Fonds Goucoch IB 25/124.

> As Mr. POUYANNE indicated on page 64 [of *Les Voies d'Eau*], certain errors were made repeatedly with regard to elementary truths about the hydrology...I believe it is useful to supplement these by describing aspects where the public and many Administrators have used this information wrongly to accept the complaints of taxpayers and give them council. The expression of these errors from the mouths of people having a certain authority, if not from the technical point of view at least from the administrative point of view, can induce public citizens to have misleading illusions and proceed with claims against the Colony.[56]

After discussing more details about observed tides, measured mean sea level, and the slope of the terrain, the Chief Engineer finally directed his blame for the failed projects to the provincial councils for failing to complete several provincial projects that were to be part of the overall hydrologic plan for the region. He suggested that the lack of technical training at the provincial level was the cause for widespread problems in the local system. The Chief Engineer also confirmed claims that crop yields had diminished; however, he disputed the causes of the reduction. He suggested that rat infestations and disease outbreaks could just as easily have reduced crop productivity.[57]

Provincial councils and administrators often complicated projects through their own local constructions. The Bình Hoa Canal followed the administrative border between

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[55] Services Agricoles et Commerciaux, "Visite Faite Les 1er et 2 Mai à l'Exploitation Rizicole de M. Labaste," 29 May 1912, TTLTQG2, Fonds Goucoch IB 25/124.

[56] Chief Engineer, Direction Générale des Travaux Publics, 1912, TTLTQG2, Fonds Goucoch IB 25/124. "Bien que M. POUYANNE ait indiqué, page 64, certaines erreurs fréquement commises et rappelé des vérités élémentaires sur les questions d'hydraulique, je crois utile de compléter ces vérités en relevant certains points qui constituent, à tort, les bases de l'opinion d'une partie du public et même de plusiers Administrateurs appelés, par leurs fonctions, à accueillir les doléances des contribuables et à leur donner des conseils. L'expression de ces erreurs par la bouche de personnes ayant une certaine autorité, sinon au point de vue technique, du moins au point de vue administratif, peut en effet induire le public à des illusions trompeuses, ou même à des revendications contre la Colonie."

the two provinces; this was a result of conflicts between villages on either side of the border. Villagers in Tân Bình Village (Định Hoà Canton, today Tân Bình Commune) petitioned their council in Cần Thơ to resolve flooding caused by embankments on the Bình Hoa Canal that had been erected in neighboring Rạch Giá Province. With the addition of the Lai Hiếu Canal in 1906, water from the river rushed into the area and was blocked by the canal. The village head in Tân Bình Village very skillfully argued that it would be impossible to pay provincial taxes if nothing was done and the rice was flooded.[58]

Increasingly, Public Works engineers could not keep ahead of so many local conflicts. As populations increased and provincial governments initiated their own efforts, the idea of a managed network slid further away. The seven-way waterway junction at Phụng Hiệp [Ngã Bảy Phụng Hiệp] was partly the result of numerous hydraulic failures and attempts to alleviate flooding by adding more canals. It grew from three minor waterways and a creek in 1880 to a 5-way intersection in 1906 and a 7-way intersection in 1916. Public Works located a national highway through here in 1906, further grounding it as a terrestrial meeting place. Like "meeting points" on *dôs d'âne*, the 7-way intersection grew into a crowded "floating market" despite problems initially encountered in dredging canals here.

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[57] Ibid.
[58] Tân Bình Village Head to M. Administrator of Cần Thơ, February 1910, TTLTQG2, Fonds Goucoch IA 13/232(5).

Unraveling the Hydraulic Web

The kind of unintentional development described above suggests that the constructive processes of dredging canals and converting swamps to rice paddy was not work that could be as easily undone as Penelope's weaving. Once waterways linked forces of human labor, political alliances, technical investments, local tides, and the larger local environment, some of the connective threads disappeared. Thousands of tenants abandoned depleted soils and numerous waterways soon became silted and impassable. The growing environmental and economic conflicts in the web of human and natural relationships on delta plantations, however, eventually threatened colonial stability. When the world economic crisis caused massive economic losses to farms in the 1930's, this unraveling finally stalled Public Works' dredging campaign in the delta.

Another way of understanding this unraveling process, however, is to see that the disintegration of existing social and natural relationships opened up possibilities for new ones. Nationalist political movements in particular focused on the worsening social and natural conditions in the Mekong Delta countryside. Conflicts over canal projects such as those cited in this chapter suggest that the roots for collapse of colonial dredging programs began decades earlier. Combier's social, moral and technical criticisms of colonial public works in 1880 resonated with later socialist critiques of the colonial economy by Vietnamese nationalists after 1930. Speculative development

projects like Lai Hiếu had justified fears that engineers were engaging in projects that would have no end.

In 1930, as anti-colonial uprisings spread in the colony, officials clung tighter than ever to their machines and the new physical infrastructure as proof of legitimacy. On September 15, 1930, just three days after French troops and aircraft opened fire on thousands of protestors in the northern city of Vinh, a steamer carried the Governor-General of Indochina, the Lieutenant-Governor of Cochinchina, and the Chief Engineer of Public Works to the docks at Rạch Giá for the inauguration of the last major project to be completed in the area, the Rạch Giá – Hà Tiên Canal. The new canal ran 60 kilometers through swampy, deforested terrain along the Gulf of Siam coast. Engineers, laborers, and the dredging enterprise had cut a path 30 meters wide through peat bogs, salt marshes and mangroves. The delegation of officials met a welcoming party divided into two lines--in one were local officials in *áo dài* and in the other were indigenous troops wearing conical hats and white uniforms. The Frenchmen, mustachioed and dressed in the suits and pith helmets of colonial officers, shook hands and spoke to the crowd (Figure 2.10).

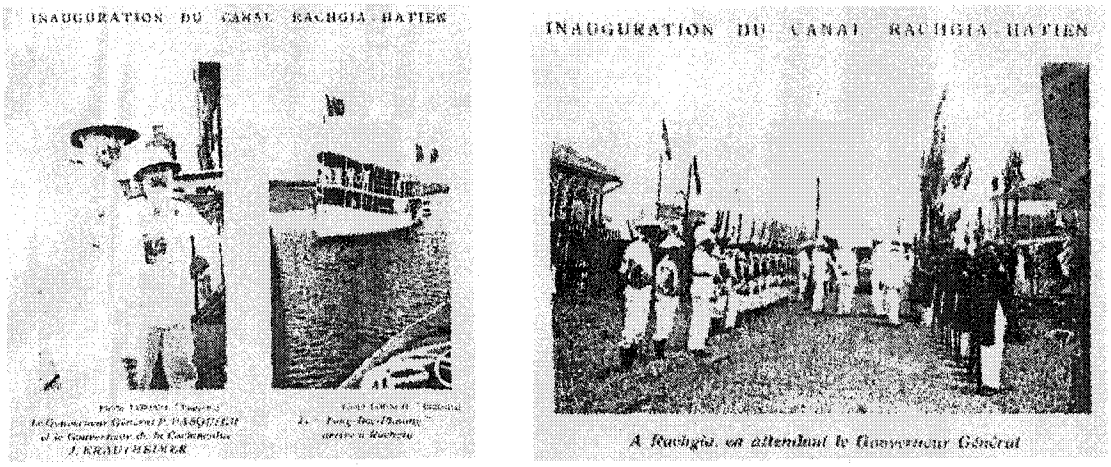


Figure 2.10: 1930 Inauguration Ceremony The pictures (above) detail a common steamer used in the Mekong Delta for mail and passenger travel. (Below) The two "faces" of a colonial reception: militia on the left and provincial leaders in áo dài on the right. Source: Government General de l'Indochine. *Dragages de Cochinchine: Canal Rachgia-Hatien.* Saigon (1930), pp. 69-70.

Governor-General Pasquier delivered a carefully crafted speech that lauded the French "hydraulic management" in the delta. He defended this part of the French colonial project against his invisible enemies in the north. In an allusion to Rudyard Kipling's controversial 1899 poem, "The White Man's Burden," he began his speech suggesting that the "cruel deception of the English poet" was that the burden had not only been carried only in the hands of the French but also by his "indigenous brothers."

> It would be necessary to doubt the intelligence and heart of the Asian people, if they were thought to be blind and insensitive to the unfolding of the French miracle.
>
> ...What brighter proof of the fertility and continuity of our politics than this hydraulic management of Cochinchina, methodically led for over 60 years without fail, since the first days of the conquest...a canal network tended by our engineers over the deltas of the Mekong and Dong Nai...developing it for the

> profits of the Vietnamese populations in these alluvial lands...heavy with silt, heavy with their future crops...[59]

Pasquier noted the dramatic increase in cultivated land, rice exports, and population to make the case for colonial rule. For him, these statistics and the machines that supported them were proof enough of the benefit of *l'oeuvre Française*:

> "From the top of one of these dredges, instruments of Progress moving untiringly through the forests of *tram* [malaleuca] and mangroves [rhizophora]—swamps inhabited until recently by herds of wild elephants...they are opening up these waterways to the sun, great life giving furrows traversing an uninhabited, uncultivated plain. I would like to show this to all denigrators of *l'oeuvre Française*, these immense expanses ... yesterday they were dismal, vast solitudes. Today they are rich patchworks, sumptuous cloisonné in which are set as far as the eye can see the gold and emerald of the peaceful fields...[60]

The Governor-General's speech gave the impression both of the uniformity of the dredging project and the uniformity of the uncultivated landscape. This idea of colonial machines moving uninterrupted, "tirelessly" forward through an empty terrain belonged to an idea of the Mekong Delta derived from the spaces of the map instead of the spaces of experience. Those more experienced in the creeks and swamps of this plain knew that converting forests to rice fields was not so easy as in other, more suitable parts of

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[59] Inspection des Travaux Publics, *Dragages de Cochinchine*, 5-6. "Il faudrait douter de l'intelligence et du coeur de ce peuple d'Asie, pour le supposer aveugle et insensible à l'éclatant miracle français. Quelle plus lumineuse preuve de la continuité, de la fécondité de notre politique, que cet aménagement hydraulique de la Cochinchine, méthodiquement conduit depuis les premiers jours de la conquête, poursuivi 60 années sans défaillance, jusqu'à réalisation d'un plan qui assure, par un réseau de canaux tendu par nos ingénieurs sur toute la péninsule deltaique du Mékong et du Donai, la mise en valeur au profit des populations annamites, de ces terres alluviuonnaires, lourdes de limon, lourdes de leurs moissons futures."

[60] Ibid., 7-8. "Du haut d'une de ces dragues, instruments de progrès, qui, depuis si longtemps, chemine inlassablement à travers la forêt de <<tram>> et de palétuviers, habitée encore il y a peu d'années par les troupeaux de l'éléphants sauvages, qui, sous le grand soleil, ouvre dans la plaine inculte, inhabitée, les grands sillons liquids qui apportent la vie, je voudrais pouvoir découvrir à tous les contempteurs de l'ouevre française ces immenses étendues, hier mornes et vastes solitudes, aujourd'hui riches damiers, somptueux cloisonnés où s'enchâssent jusqu'à l'horizon, l'or et l'émeraude des champs pacifiques."

the delta. The dredges were not moving through a homogenous territory but one where the vegetations, soils, and hydrology varied greatly. The idea of water management achieved via these "instruments of Progress" was the engineer's dream: controlling the forces of rivers and tides into a steady state—in hydraulics, in ecology, in agriculture, and in politics. It reflected the problematic linkage in high modernist engineering projects of environmental stability in terms of "steady-state" hydraulics with the idea of a steady political state. The failure of colonial engineers and administrators to control physical changes caused by the rivers, floods and tides thus implied their failure to control social change as well.

Following the Governor-General, a Vietnamese provincial representative (*thống đốc*) from Rạch Giá Province addressed the audience in Vietnamese and took a very different tone towards the canal works. He noted the technical work of the French, but then he recognized the massive efforts of Vietnamese people who had "cleared wastelands" (*khẩn hoàng đất*) and converted land into rice. The colonial mandarin described in different terms a Vietnamese *oeuvre*, that of thousands of people coming to the region, converting brackish soils to freshwater paddy, pulling out tangled stumps, and turning forests into farmland.[61] This work was not methodical or steady, but difficult and exhausting. After the dredges passed, in effect the real work began.

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[61] Ibid., 75.

This rhetorical emphasis on indigenous, human work instead of French, mechanical work suggests that the canal network was really a product of multiple rhetorical "works" operating simultaneously. Even within elite circles, landowners, politicians, engineers, and entrepreneurs understood the canals and the water network differently. Each new project was a kind of instrument in itself, advancing different visions of the water landscape. The thousands of tenant farmers who worked on plantations or the people who worked on the dredges also participated in their own more limited, direct conversions. The most silent actors in this constructive alliance were the rivers and tides, ultimately supporting or undermining these different human projects.

The dredging campaigns never achieved a "final form" to a water network, though they dramatically altered the hydraulic environment. With increasing debts, a failing rural economy, and almost total destruction of the remaining forests and wetlands in the 1920's, the colonial network of waterways increasingly came undone after 1930. Conflicts that broke out between farmers and engineers on the canal banks defined boundaries between competing visions not only for the waterways but for delta society as well. It was not so much a conflict over the nature of hydraulic technologies as a conflict over how water fit into these competing social ideas.

CHAPTER III: THE AGRICULTURAL CRISIS AND THE *CASIER* LANDSCAPE (1930-1945)

When the global economic crisis reached Indochina in late 1930, small landowners and tenant farmers suffered severely from economic losses. The price of Saigon No. 1 polished grain slid from its peak price of $13.10 (piasters per 100 kg) in 1930 to a low of $3.20 in 1934. Relative to other export commodities—rubber, tin, corn, and cotton—rice lost 51% more value during this period.[1] Despite attempts to expand production to meet debts, total exports dropped from 1.8 million tons in 1928 to 1.2 million in 1933; the total area of land in cultivation also decreased from 2.2 million hectares to 1.85 million. Ecological degradation, especially resulting in several major floods in the 1920's and 1930's, amplified the effects of the economic crisis by causing massive crop losses in some of the newly-settled areas of Đồng Tháp and Long Xuyên.[2]

The agricultural crisis that ensued from these social and environmental events was a catalyst for ongoing rural protest, exposing flaws in the public works and social crises in labor practices and land tenure. Both anti-colonial nationalists and pro-colonial reformists used the crisis to focus urban attentions on problems associated with land tenure and the plight of displaced farmers. They focused much of this attention on the

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[1] Paul Bernard, *Le Problème Économique Indochinois* (Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Latines, 1934), 123-124.
[2] Ibid., 131.

western delta where a handful of landlords owned thousands of hectares of land in large plantations. Many who owned less than 10 hectares of land and had taken out loans to purchase before 1930 suffered bankruptcy. Land values slid with the rice market from a price of 1,000 piasters per hectare in 1930 to less than 200 piasters in 1934. While the colonial government forgave some debt for plantations and enterprises, local people received no special relief and these pre-1930 debts resulted in widespread foreclosures. The price drop also affected tenants who after 1930 had to sell two or three times as much rice to cover taxes that were calculated in piasters and not rice. Where 15 days of agricultural labor once sufficed to pay a poll tax before 1930, now the required term was two to three months.[3] Angry groups associated with radical political parties in northern and central Việt Nam demanded reduced taxes, rents and interest rates and a "land to the tiller" policy that supported small farming over absentee land ownership.[4]

As an economic and social catalyst, the agricultural crisis undermined the old alliance that for thirty years had constructed new waterways and opened up new lands in the Mekong Delta. New actors began to influence land policies here—angry farmers, urban intellectuals, and researchers from new schools of research in human geography, agricultural engineering, and social science. Along with engineers, administrators and landowners, they reshaped the development goals for water projects and the delta landscape in the 1930's and 1940's. Farmers organized protests and occasionally

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[3] Nguyễn Khắc Viên, *Vietnam: A Long History* (Hà Nội: Thế Giới Publishers, 1993), 205.
[4] Ibid., p. 207.

resorted to violent means to seize granaries or oppose those who claimed title to lands they had cleared and farmed. Nationalists also articulated these conflicts between tenant farmers and landlords in more radical terms influenced by Marxist class politics in Europe and Asia.

During this period of agricultural and social crisis, researchers initiated a new wave of studies in demography, soil science and human geography that had widespread impacts on subsequent hydraulic projects. This research generally sought to understand systemic patterns in traditional agricultural areas and in new technologies such as aerial photography and theories of human geography that redefined ideas of hydraulics and hydraulic nature. Major works from this period such as Pierre Gourou's *Les Paysans du Delta Tonkinois* (1936) were foundational works both to an emerging cadre of Vietnamese social scientists and to foreign researchers interested in relationships between Asian cultures and the physical environment.[5]

The "birds-eye view" afforded by aerial photos shifted the colonial gaze towards the hydraulic landscape by depicting the interior spaces between canals and roads as intricate and fractured patchworks of fields, orchards, hedgerows, and homes. The empty white spaces on the topographer's map was replaced with the vibrant mosaics of fields, dikes, and villages. Engineers and scientists quickly recognized the value of

[5] Pierre Gourou, *Les Paysans du Delta Tonkinois: Etude de Geographie Humaine* (Paris: Les Editions d'Art et d'Histoire, 1936).

such interior landscapes subdivided into so many cells of dikes and canals, and they used the term *casier* to describe this landform.

The idea of building *casiers* gradually replaced the desire to continue extending a troubled water network. This emergence of a new form of state vision happened for multiple reasons: developments in geographical research of "traditional" agricultural systems, observations of "scientific agriculture" projects in the Mekong Delta, and concern about growing numbers of displaced tenant farmers and the spread of abandoned land. These environmental and social crises of the 1930's, however, did not completely break up the old alliance of landowners, entrepreneurs, engineers, and officials. The dredging enterprise and hydraulic engineers continued to be a powerful force in state projects; the dredging contract continued to 1939. Old debates over development policies, however, merged into the growing nationalist, anti-colonial discourse of the era. The "rural question" that American and Vietnamese strategists brought up in the 1950's and 1960's concerning peasant support for Việt Minh / NLF operations had its roots in these older land disputes that were articulations of even longer-standing crises over land tenure and taxation.

This chapter examines the social and ecological nature of the agricultural crisis and the creation of *casiers* as a new kind of constructed landscape in the 1930's and 1940's. The political expediencies of settling landless farmers upset by the crisis required some

form of response. The result, these *casiers* in the flooded western plains, were based on colonial ideas of peasants and nature as observed in *traditional* agricultural landscapes such as the Red River Delta.

Ecological Dimensions of the Agricultural Crisis

The treeless horizons of "abandoned lands" in the western Mekong Delta were physical reminders of the environmental and social failures of past irrigation and settlement projects. With each new canal, the forests and wetlands of Cà Mau, Long Xuyên and Đồng Tháp gradually disappeared, leaving wide vistas of "wasteland." After just a few years of cultivation, tenants abandoned these plantations because of poor soils and often poor working conditions. Some large canals such as Lai Hiếu worsened local flooding and even reduced yields. Quản Lô – Phụng Hiệp Canal (1913-1918) paralleled Lai Hiếu and was in part a more massive attempt to remedy the flooding by extending canals even further southward into Cà Mau. It simply relocated floods from Phụng Hiệp to the interior of Cà Mau; here it brought new floods that drowned existing fields. The water stilled into a "vast pool good only for hatching moths and other insects harmful to rice."[6]

[6] M. Combot and Paul Emery,"Etude sur les Travaux d'Hydraulique Agricole dans le Trans-Bassac," 20 October 1942, TTLTQG2, TDBCPNV H62/3, 3.

Most of the territory described as *terres abandonées* in colonial reports corresponded to the inundated, treeless plains in Đồng Tháp, Long Xuyên and Cà Mau. Past canal projects were concentrated in these areas as engineers attempted to drain these areas and make them more habitable for sustained rice cultivation. By contrast, farms in the eastern, coastal provinces and along the tidal creeks remained densely populated and produced high yields throughout the 1930's. Crowded cantons such as Nhơn Ái and Nhơn Nghĩa on the old Xà No Creek were regions where Vietnamese migrants had established villages before the colonial conquest. While these traditionally farmed regions were disturbed by canal projects, the most severe disturbances occurred in the heart of the plantation lands in the Transbassac.

Another limiting factor in the western delta was the buildup of alum (acid sulphate) from canal drainage.[7] New canals often reduced tidal fluctuation of water levels to just a few centimeters, thus preventing farmers from draining acidic water from their fields. In the Long Xuyên Quadrangle, canals also lowered the water table during the dry season; this increased levels of alum through oxidation of soils at the same time that it

[7] Alum (đất phen) refers to aluminum and ferrous silicates (pyrite mottles) found in soils such as in Đồng Tháp, Long Xuyên and Phụng Hiệp that are waterlogged, rich in organic content, and periodically flushed by sea-water containing dissolved sulfate. Drainage and drying of the soils causes oxidation of the sulfate and results in severely acidic water. Acidic water itself is not a threat to rice or aquatic ecosystems; but the acidic water may dissolve more toxic ions of aluminum and iron that kills or severely limits rice growth. For a summary of key wetland processes in the Mekong Delta see Vietnam Program, BirdLife International, *The Conservation of Key Wetland Sites in the Mekong Delta: Conservation Report Number 12* (Hà Nội: Institute of Ecology and Biological Resources, 1999). Also see Nguyễn Hưu Chiếm, *Studies on Agro-Ecological Environment.*

reduced the overall available water supply. Lower water levels also allowed salt water to intrude deeper inland.[8]

Forest destruction also played an important role by eliminating natural buffers to water acidity. Before 1906, the Long Xuyên Plain was still mostly covered in fresh and brackish inundated forests composed of tropical hardwood species (dipterocarps) on higher ground and two primary mangrove species on the lower terrain, Malaleuca cajuputi (*cây tràm*) and Ecoecaria agallocha (cây giá). The existence of these forests prevented rapid evaporation of water from the soil and slowed the exit of fresh water to the coast. Soils that were perpetually inundated rarely oxidized and thus kept alum levels low.[9]

The rapid extension of new canals across the Long Xuyên Quadrangle in the 1920's eliminated this buffering effect of western forests. One administrator in Rạch Giá in 1931 complained of forest fires that had spread for three consecutive dry seasons as new immigrants burned off trees and vegetation to clear soil for rice. On the Ba Thê Canal, a debris fire ignited the underlying peat soil that had completely dried due to lowering

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[8] A. Normandin, *Travaux d'Hydraulique Agricole à étudier et à Entreprendre en Cochinchine* (Saigon: Imprimerie Commerciale M. Rey, 1913), 31.

[9] *Cây tràm* is still important in the delta as a source of rot-proof wood for construction and for medicinal "tea tree" oil. *Tràm* posts are used as pilings in foundations and for stilt houses. Fishermen used to use leaves and resin from *cây giá* as a neurotoxin to stun fish; and honey gatherers captured honey from bees that pollinated both species. The name of the coastal city Rạch Giá refers to a creek (*rạch*) bordered by stands of *giá* trees. *Malaleuca* mangroves buffered acidic water, absorbing aluminum and iron ions through their roots. Dr. Đương Văn Ni and others at Cần Thơ University have recently completed studies on the positive effects of malaleuca-fish-rice systems for reducing acid sulfate. See Võ Tồng Xuan and Shigeo Matsui, ed, *Development of Farming Systems,* 195.

of the water table. The fires burned out of control over 15,000 hectares (37,000 acres) in one season. This pattern continued each dry season in the peat soil areas until the remaining forest and peat were destroyed, leaving only marine clays and surface layers of organic deposits.[10] A brief period of high productivity followed the burnings; farmers reported harvests almost double the average productivity of 1 ton per hectare. Within a few years however, parched soils produced toxic levels of alum in the soil.[11] Canals collected and concentrated these toxins, making irrigation of crops in prolonged dry seasons extremely difficult as outside water might be more toxic than water in the fields.

Annual river floods created more rapid, catastrophic events that destroyed crops and forced thousands to abandon their fields. In an average year, the river rose 2 to 3 meters above mean sea level (MSL) in September and October. Typically, flood waters emptied across the Long Xuyên Plain to the sea and across the Đồng Tháp Plain to the Vàm Cò River. [Figure 3.1] Floods moved from day to day depending on canals, dikes, and other features of the terrain below. Water levels dissipated eastward in the winding creeks and rivers of the alluvial zone. This annual high-water event effectively defined agricultural and ecological boundaries in the Mekong Delta. Sedentary farming was most densely located in the eastern regions of the delta where annual flooding was

[10] "L'Administrateur de Rach Gia a Monsieur le Gouverneur de la Cochinchine au sujet de la petit colonisation dans le Canton de Kien Hao," 7 December 1932, TTLTQG2, Fonds Goucoch IB23/096 (12), 3.

[11] Nicolau, L'Ingenieur en Chef de la Circonscription de HANSI à Mr le Directeur des Bureaux, 17 August 1943, TTLTQG2, Goucoch Divers H.61/50.

least pronounced. In Long Xuyên and Đồng Tháp, mobile farmers traditionally planted 'floating rice' (*Oryza rufipogon*) instead of the short-stem rice sold on the international market. Floods also restocked fields and swamps with fish species that typically bred upriver in the lakes and marshes in Cambodia. As the water receded, these fish were effectively trapped in residual ponds, providing an easy source of protein for farmers in drier months.

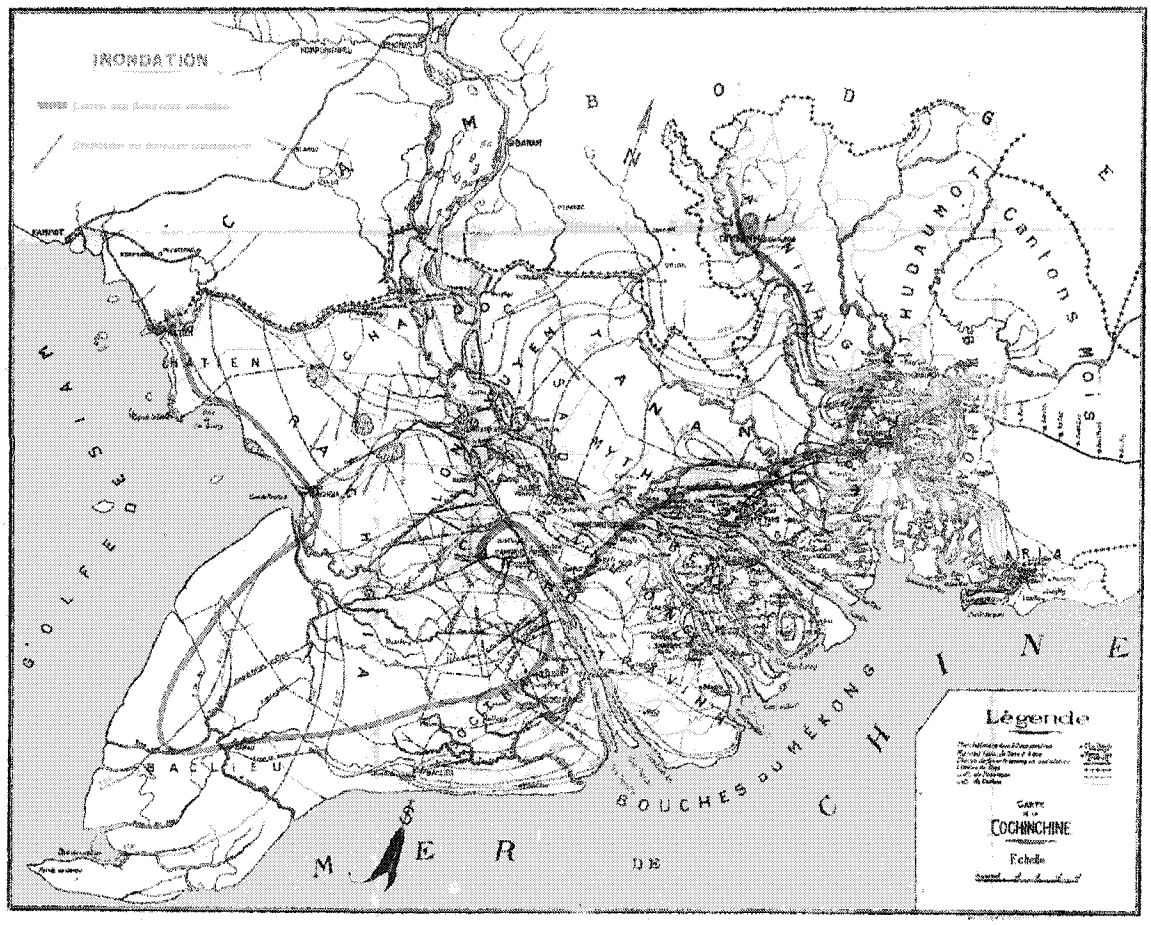


Figure 3.1: Extent of Flooding. This 1911 map shows the extent of flooding in an average year, with the red lines detailing average depths of water. At Châu Đốc Province where the two branches of the Mekong cross the border of Cochinchina (Việt Nam), average flood water depth was 4.0 meters above MSL. Each red lines to the east represents a decrease of .5 meters in water depth. The green arrows show the general migration of the flood across the Long Xuyên Plain on the right or lower bank and

across the Đồng Tháp Plain on the left or upper bank. The patches of red in the Long Xuyên Plain represent mountainous areas.

The construction of new infrastructure and rice plantations in the western delta set landowners and tenants to suffer disastrous losses during severe flood years. In September 1923, the river flooded a few weeks earlier than normal, rising 5.8 meters above sea level on September 6 at the Châu Đốc water station. Water rushed over the banks and dikes, covering 80% of the province. After the flood receded, the administrator of the province requested 25,000 tons of rice in immediate aid. The province's average harvest of 125,000 tons of rice was lost. Downstream on the Phụng Hiệp plantations, flooding was less severe but prolonged. The waters crested on three separate occasions—September 28th, October 15th, and November 12th—with flood waters reaching 2.8 meters above sea level. Wealthier landlords used dikes and diesel pumps to protect their fields, while less prosperous farmers and tenants were forced to harvest quickly and wait out the floods. As the 1923 flood reached the alluvial regions of Mỹ Tho Province east of the Đồng Tháp Plain in October, the administrator there recorded that for two or three weeks of high waters, farmers became fishermen and spent their days casting nets from boats.[12] Here farmers had several weeks warning of the coming waters and could prepare their harvests and homes to respond to the floods.

[12] "Rapport de l'Inspecteur des Affairs Politiques au sujet des inondations dans le Province de Chaudoc," 12 September 1923, TTLTQG2, Goucoch Divers H.5/SL 1760. See also "Administrateur du Mytho a la Gouverneur de la Cochinchine," 3 October 1923, TTLTQG2, Goucoch Divers H.5/SL 1760.

Canal banks and the highways constructed on top of them such as along the Rạch Giá - Hà Tiên Canal turned into long earthen dams during the flood. They caused waters to drain more slowly, prolonging flooding in the interior region from a few weeks to more than a month. Engineers responded to these problems by constructing mobile barriers and drainage gates along the Rạch Giá - Hà Tiên Canal, but expansions of new waterways and roads inside the plain continued to restrict flood drainage.[13]

Flood events were social and natural phenomena because of the role that officials, engineers, landowners, and farmers played in altering the terrain. Fields, canals, and roads rerouted floodwaters in new and unpredictable ways. Scientific knowledge of flood movement was limited to graphs of high/low water measurements taken on a weekly basis at a handful of stations along the main rivers. There were no hydrologic models for predicting flood movement in response to features of the terrain, only predictions of water levels at certain waterway measuring stations. Understandings of flooding then were limited to only the broadest descriptions of water depths over areas covering thousands of hectares.[14]

A major flood in 1929 left thousands homeless and without their harvests one year before the slide in rice prices began; this had an especially harsh effect as many tenants

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[13] Paul Emery, "Etude sur les Travaux d'Hydraulique Agricole dans le Trans-Bassac," 20 October 1942, TTLTQG2, TDBCPNV H.62/3.
[14] *Voies d'Eau,* 20-22. Also see Service de la Navigation, "Bulletins des Crues 1920-21," TTLTQG2, Fonds Goucoch. IA2/222(1).

struggled to repay their debts on top of recovering from lost harvests in 1929. In Tân An on the eastern edge of Đồng Tháp Plain, 400 people—mostly women and children—took refuge at the provincial SICAM credit office. Thousands had abandoned their homes to the flood in search of higher ground. Crop losses for those who had borrowed money from the credit offices led to hundreds of foreclosures as rice prices fell during the next harvest and farmers could not repay loans.[15] The colonial government refused to forgive these individual loans while it provided emergency loans such as a million-piaster fund to rubber plantations and other large colonial enterprises. The justification was that maintenance of such enterprises was vital to the security of the colony. Economist Paul Bernard in 1934 argued that the slide in prices and the failure to respond to these agricultural debts was causing widespread social and political crises in the countryside. In interior regions of the delta far from towns and markets, rice was a virtual currency. Debts and exchanges were calculated in piasters but paid in *giạ* (about 20 kg) of rice. Debts incurred after flood losses in 1929 would have been payable at a rate of one *giạ* equal to $P1.20. During the economic crisis, the value of a *giạ* decreased to $P.30 requiring farmers to supply four times as much rice to meet pre-1929 debts.[16]

With proportionally more rice going to granaries after this devaluation of rice, tensions with tenant farmers increased. A flood in the fall of 1937 damaged harvests in Bạc Liêu

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[15] *Dossiers Divers Relatifs aux Crues de Mekong*, TTLTQG2, Goucoch Divers H.5/HS 2938.
[16] Paul Bernard. *La Problème Économique Indochinoise*, 144-145.

and the Cà Mau Peninsula. As landowners scrambled to recover their share of rice from tenants, food shortages spread. For the remainder of the year and again during the flood season of 1938, bands of farmers raided granaries and seized money from landlords. A government investigation concluded that these organized raids were increasingly of a political nature, as groups had carefully coordinated their attacks. In a rare condemnation of existing practices, the report also concluded that the root of the problem was the insufficient regulation of landlord-tenant contracts. It favored replacing the complicated arrangements of "pseudo-contracts" with a standardized salary for seasonal work. By creating a "prolétariat agricole", farmers would not be reduced to the desperate situations of tenants who suffered from usury and abuses of tenant-landlord contracts.[17] As social events, floods disrupted provincial budgets with crop losses and ultimately pushed farmers and tenants to more desperate action. The existing regime of labor contracts, land rents, and small loans added on to the damaging effects of floods; they caused an occasional natural catastrophe to have widespread effects for regional social and political stability.

Social Dimensions of the Agricultural Crisis

Persistent social and economic problems for small farmers and tenants, especially issues of land tenure and labor contracts, played an important role in the agricultural crisis.

[17] M. Bagot, "Malaise Agraire dans le Transbassac," 28 April 1939, TTLTQG2, TDBCDNV M.2/63.

Terms of land ownership and labor contracting dated to the first years of the colonial conquest, but it was only during the crisis of the 1930's that problems with legal codes and prevailing practices reached wider circles of debate among government authorities and the public in Sài Gòn. The colonial government practiced a land policy of "dualism" that applied a French system of land ownership to French citizens and the traditional Vietnamese legal code and land registry (địa bộ) dating back to King Gia Long's promulgations in the early 1800's and King Minh Mạng's 1836 land registry of the Mekong Delta. Beginning in 1864, land transactions between French and *assimilés* (local people who had French citizenship) proceeded under French statutes while transactions between Vietnamese and "other Asians" (Chinese, Thais, Khmers, Chams, and Malays) continued under a poorly interpreted Vietnamese legal code. This policy continued for more than sixty years, reaffirmed by colonial courts in 1922; and it resulted in a legal division of the rural landscape between lands dating back to entries in the *địa bộ* and lands covering a few million hectares that were otherwise assigned in concessions and colonial land sales.[18]

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[18] John Bassford. "Land Development Policy in Cochinchina Under the French" (PhD Dissertation, University of Hawaii, 1984), 123. Bassford argues that colonial officials did not enact the "dualism" policy as a form of apartheid but rather as a means of establishing defineable spatial boundaries around lands that had already been cleared and claimed by local farmers before the conquest in 1858. Preserving a Vietnamese system was seen as a means of preventing social unrest that might result from widespread dispossession of existing lands. By applying the same laws governing land tenure as existed in France at the time, the administrators sought to protect "absolutely" the rights of French citizens by documenting exact spatial boundaries of land and legal titles recognized in French courts. Under the "benevolent" reformed policies of the civilian government of Le Myre de Vilers in 1879, the move to reform the Vietnamese registers (*địa bộ*) was born out of an effort to improve and solidify local land rights in the direction of French land title laws. Wealthy Vietnamese landowners and corrupt local colonial officers exploited the dual land policy to expand their own estates often at the expense of illiterate farmers.

This legal division between French and indigenous land holdings roughly followed ecological boundaries between alluvial regions and floodplains. Villages in the east that had been established for decades or centuries before French conquest were located in a region that allowed for consistent harvests and was protected from flooding. Villagers in these areas had greater access to merchant networks and education while those living in the western plains lived nomadic, frontier lives until the 1870's. Public works projects such as Xà No Canal intersected these two worlds, engineers leading the dredges through waterways and paddies of established villages. While the government affirmed its right to seize lands for public right of way, it could not reassign titled land to colonial patrons. The Guery Concession of some 6,000 hectares along the banks of Xà No extended to the bounds of Nhơn Nghĩa and Nhơn Ái Villages, but not over. Conceived as legal "empty zones," the western regions of the delta became prime for consolidation of large estates owned by French and naturalized (*assimilés*) citizens.

This separation of indigenous and colonial farmland—both ecologically and legally—was rough and ambiguous. There were frequent encroachments by parties from both spheres and continuing disputes within colonial or indigenous realms throughout the era of canal expansion. One such dispute along the boundary between colonial and indigenous land involved the former mayor of Sài Gòn, Roche-François Carabelli who in November 1888, had acquired from the Colonial Council about 6,000 hectares of land in the Kê Sạch district near Sóc Trang and Phụng Hiệp. At Caribelli's request, the

provincial administrator organized a crew to dig an 8 km canal bisecting the property; the administrator charged Carabelli $1756.10 for the work. The former mayor repaid all but $600 of this fee before returning to France in 1892. He died there in 1895 and the land passed to his brother.[19] Despite local Vietnamese petitions to buy parcels of the land from the government (land where farmers had built houses on the canal banks), the colonial government continued to hold Carabelli's heir accountable for the debts. This heir resided in Corsica and had never even set foot in the colony. Local villagers living beside the new canal petitioned their district chief for the right to buy adjacent lands on the abandoned estate, noting that the sale of small parcels for the village would allow more than 100 persons to convert marshes "filled with birds and rats, destroyers of paddy" into productive farmland.[20] The government in Sài Gòn did eventually agree to sell and divide the old concession, but mostly through auction of larger parcels to colonial citizens under the French system of land auction and tenure. The sluggishness at which the Colonial Council and the Governor responded to local claims was indicative of their reticence to merge the two systems of land use. That would involve legal complications in the colony and abroad as French lawyers at home represented distant heirs in French courts. Local farmers were forced to petition their district chiefs and provincial leaders for sales through the separate *địa bộ* code. Partly in response to continued criticism of the land concession policies, the government passed new

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[19] Roussin, Chef du 4e Bureau, "Rapport au Lieutenant Gouverneur. No. 190," 21 December 1896, TTLTQG2, Fonds Goucoch IB23/122(2).
[20] Chief of Kế Sách Village to Chief of Đinh Khánh Canton, 15 December 1896, TTLTQG2, Fonds Goucoch IB23/122(2).

resolutions in 1913 to shrink the size of new concessions, but existing concessions not under cultivation—some covering several thousand hectares—were not liable to be sold until new decrees were passed in 1918 and 1926.[21]

The devaluation of land after 1930 and the bankruptcy of many planters—both French and local—led to a sudden shift in the demography of landowners in the Mekong Delta. When asked about landlords in the Cần Thơ area, farmers repeatedly mentioned the conversion of lands from Europeans to Vietnamese, Chinese and Khmer landlords in the 1930's. While their legal status was typically that of French citizens, owners of large plantations included Vietnamese wives of Frenchmen and their *métis* descendants as well as *assimilé* Chinese, Khmer, and Vietnamese. From a tenant's perspective, the exchange of lands from European to local landlords meant a worsening of terms. Ông Mươi, who lived on the Saintenoy Canal in the 1930's, recalled such a shift in land ownership from French and French nationals (*assimilé*) to local landlords, some in-laws of the French.[22]

When asked why the French didn't do well financially, Ông Mười emphasized that French-born planters were more lenient on tenant debts. Tenants were free to gather fish and glean rice from French plantations after the crop was gathered. Local landlords enforced debt terms more strictly and compounded unpaid loans from year to year—

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[21] Pierre Brocheux, "Grands propriétaires et fermiers dans l'ouest de la Cochinchine pendant la période coloniale," *Revue Historique* 499 (July-September 1971), 61.
[22] Ông Mười, Interview One, April 12, 2002, [066-084].

especially after the losses in 1930. On Labaste's plantation tenants were more crowded than neighboring indigenous ones. Ông Rì noted that between French and locally-owned plantations, the French plantations were always more crowded with tenants. Besides debt forgiveness and free fishing rights, the French also allowed ownership of livestock to pass to the tenant if the price could be paid in full with rice.[23]

After the onset of the Depression, with increasing conversions of land title to local owners, conditions became more harsh. During harvests, some landlords locked the gates on dikes and guarded fields to prevent tenants from gleaning or fishing. Hired crews of toughs ransacked tenant houses looking for pilfered grain:

> Before the wet season arrived and the grass still young, they asked us to clear it—we had to! After that, the grass was still young, and without water [in the field] it grew fast. Then they forced us to clear it again! Just like that, we worked a lot—"giang lưng lớn" [working with our backs "looking at" the sky]. Just working for some rice to eat. Then the harvest came, the canals were dry around here, and they came around to take the rice. If we wanted to eat, we had to beg for some rice. But it was not easy... They cut it, and when it was harvested they gave us one or two gịa. Then we beat the rice, and exposed it to the sun to dry it and eat. When the harvest came, they brought their canoes we called "striped tigers" and people went to our houses to rob up our rice! They did not even leave a cup of rice for the children's food. The rice traws that we used for beating the rice were even checked. They thought we hid rice in the straw, so they took everything, there was nothing left.[24]

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[23] Ông Rì, Interview Two, April 12, 2002, [003-020].

[24] Ông Hai, Interview Three, April 13, 2002, [024-040]. "Nói thí dụ, tới mùa nước chưa có, cỏ chưa già, còn non trong, nó kêu mình phát, minh phải phát! Phát rồi, cỏ non, không có nước, nó lên. Nó lên cái rồi, rồi nó bắt mình chế lại một lần nữa! Nội cái dó không, mình mần, giang lưng lớn mần lấy hột lúa mà ăn thôi. Rồi tới mùa, kinh
xuống cạn hết trơn ... xung quanh, nó di canh, tuần ... Mình ăn thì phải xin bông [lúa] nó. Mà dễ gì ... Nó phát rồi, tới khi gặt hái rồi, nó cho ăn một gịa hoặc hai giạ thì mình dạp, mình phơi, mình ăn. Chứ không có dược tự do dạp, phơi Khổ. Nhưng tới mùa rồi, nó dem chẹt, táo, cọp rằn, nhân công lại nhà mình, lúa bao nhiêu nó xúc hết! Không còn một táo cho gà ăn. Mà rơm của mình dã dập, nó tốc ra, nó suốt, nó vạch, nó kiếm. Nó sợ mình giấu ở trông...Lấy sạch trơn, không còn."

Such consolidations of non-titled lands in the remote southern region of Cà Mau had led to an outbreak of violence even before the economic crisis in 1927 that hinted at worsening disparities in land tenure arrangements between a village of Khmer farmers and some powerful local officials and landlords. Lê Quang Liêm, a wealthy landowner from Rạch Giá who served on the Colonial Council, reported the events of a "scuffle" in the remote village of Ninh Thạnh Lợi in which several colonial troops, a few district officials, and scores of villagers died over several days of fighting. The story ran as a lengthy serial in the Sài Gòn newspaper, *Tribune Indochinoise.* Ninh Thạnh Lợi was a Khmer village in the southern reaches of Rạch Giá Province near Bạc Liêu. Most of Cà Mau Peninsula was still forested at this time, and a large population of Khmer people settled here as Vietnamese and colons continued to claim lands closer to the main rivers. Cà Mau, named after the Khmer word *tuk khmau* meaning "black water," was a swampy refuge of twisting creeks inaccessible from the major agricultural regions. After completion of several canals into the region, a canton chief , Cai Tổng Ngô, obtained title to Ninh Thạnh Lợi's lands.

Under several aliases, Ngô amassed 11,000 hectares of land in the region—much of this land already farmed and inhabited. After gaining title, Ngô demanded that villagers pay him agricultural taxes. Hướng Chủ Chot, the village head of Ninh Thạnh Lợi,

organized a protest along with a healer named Thầy Cá who prepared spells and amulets to make villagers immune from harm. Beginning in late April, the village organized loud parties, proclaiming their independence from taxation and declaring the Celestial Emperor as their only overlord. They designated Chot as king, carrying him on a makeshift palanquin. On May 4th, the group traveled to neighboring Vĩnh Phong village and the following night they visited Vĩnh Thuận village.[25]

The vice-chief of the district, Hiền, visited the village with an armed escort several days later. He was rebuffed by a crowd of angry villagers holding torches and knives, who claimed their allegiance to their new king and dismissed his requests to discuss matters. Hiền returned to his post. A band of eight villagers then followed Hiền back to the district town and broke into the canton chief's home. Finding nobody home, they then visited one of Ngô's confidants, a Chinese named Huôi. Huôi's son was listed in provincial records as the village chief of Ninh Thạnh Lợi. At the time, this son was away serving in the Foreign Legion. The band of villagers then decided to kill Huôi in the son's place, decapitating him and showing his head back at the village communal house.[26]

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[25] Lê Quang Liêm, "La vérité sur l'échauffourée de Ninh-Thanh-Loi (Rachgia)," *Tribune Indochinoise*, May 20, 1927, 1-2.
[26] Lê Quang Liêm, "La vérité sur l'échauffourée de Ninh-Thanh-Loi (Rachgia)," *Tribune Indochinoise*, May 23, 1927, 1-2.

As news spread from Bạc Liêu of the violence, the provincial Administrator sent one French policeman with eight of his Vietnamese officers on a public works steamer armed with rifles to apprehend the party at Ninh Thạnh Lợi the following evening. When they reached the village along one of the canals, the group split and the soldiers who left the village center were surprised by a large group waiting for them in the forest. Realizing he might be overpowered, the Frenchman raced back to the boat and prepared an escape. He abandoned three of the officers on the canal embankment. Only one of them knew how to swim, and he survived by jumping into the canal and swimming to the boat. The other two died leaving their guns and bullets to the villagers.[27]

The wounded gendarme and his soldiers retreated to a rice mill at Bang-Biên Bên (near present-day Phước Long). After hearing about the worsening situation in the village, merchants and wealthy landowners abandoned mills and houses for the nearest town, Long Mỹ. They feared that a more general insurrection might be underway in the Bạc Liêu area. At 6 am the following morning, a French lieutenant accompanied by thirty well-armed Vietnamese soldiers arrived at Ninh Thanh Lợi. After a brief battle, they torched the communal house with Chot and his band inside.[28] A political inquest committee interviewed Khmer monks some days later to determine if the uprising was part of any larger conspiracy. When the committee returned to the village, they found

[27] Lê Quang Liêm, "La vérité sur l'échauffourée de Ninh-Thanh-Loi (Rachgia)," *Tribune Indochinoise,* May 25, 1927, 1-2.
[28] Ibid.

thirty cadavers inside the charred remains of the house, the bodies burned too badly to recognize if one of them was Chot. Lê Quang Liêm argued repeatedly in his newspaper account that the cause of the tragedy was not nationalism but economics. Under the French legal system, canton chiefs had gained legal title to form small fiefdoms, dispossessing farmers from lands they had claimed by virtue of clearing them years before.

Such episodes of violence also highlighted the connected role that ethnic tensions played into land tenure disputes. Lacking the ability to read or write in either French or Vietnamese, many Khmer farmers were left without standing in either the French or traditional legal systems of land ownership.

The Colonial Council attempted to respond to this issue not by incorporating Khmer land rights but instead by relocating dispossessed Khmer farmers into abandoned areas closer to Cambodia in the western floodplain. An Office of Colonization offered 5-hectare plots for each applicant family and located these plots adjacent to the newly completed Rạch Giá - Hà Tiên Canal, Tri Tôn Canal, and Ba Thê Canal. The new settlers, eager to gain legal title, quickly set up their houses and fields along the main canals. Each household was required to put the land into production and pay taxes with rice. The result was a flood of applications, including from many Vietnamese farmers, too. Colonial officials worried that they could not adequately control the "type of

person" who staked a claim. Noting that these tenants had worked for landlords in a state of "semi-slavery", provincial Administrators also worried that they did not possess a suitable "love of the land whose demonstration is the care taken in cultivation."[29] Settlement was uneven, and the clearing of forests in these areas coincided with forest fires that spread and depleted soils in the region.

Social unrest was also due to migration and colonial policies regarding migrants, most of whom were impoverished farmers from Tonkin who volunteered to enter a labor contract in exchange for transport to the plantations in the Mekong Delta. These workers, called *engagés*, were almost all young men who left their ancestral homelands in hopes of owning land in the new agricultural regions of the south. In 1907, a newly formed Colonization Office in Cần Thơ brought 84 *engagés* to plantations near Phụng Hiệp. Facing unfamiliar agricultural practices, harsh working conditions and the extent of so much open land beyond the plantation, this group fled and hid in the swamps. Police later found them and returned the survivors back to their home province of Thái Bình in 1908.[30] The move south was economically and socially challenging; it represented a move away from the family and village, one's "homeland" (*quê hương*), for a landscape that was ecologically and socially foreign.

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[29] L'administrateur des Services Civils, Chef de la province de Rachgia à Monsieur le Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, 7 December 1932, TTLTQG2, Fonds Goucoch IB23/096(19).

[30] Sơn Nam. *Lịch Sử Khẩn Hoàng Miền Nam*, 274. Some Javanese workers also came to the Mekong Delta as laborers—more than half of them renewed their contracts. Like the Tonkinese, they came from a rice-growing region of Southeast Asia that was known both for its dense population and long tradition of rice cultivation. This smaller migration continued until the Dutch restricted labor emigration after World War I. Landowners also considered Javanese labor too expensive because of their dietary constraints. See Pierre Brocheux, *The Mekong Delta*, 27.

Only landlords could initiate this emigration, requesting so many persons and paying for their transport.[31] Once *engagés* arrived at a plantation in the Mekong Delta, they had to work off the debt from their passage and all debts for provisions at interest rates determined by the landowner. In smaller concessions, landowners often modified or abandoned obligations to pay salaries as stipulated in the labor contracts. Conditions on the larger, industrial plantations were often much better. Because of the size of the operation, the owner was more likely to offer all laborers a decent base standard in housing and supplies.[32] Nationalist and reformist critics of this contract labor program described it as a 20th century form of slavery. Plantation owners paid 2500 to 3000 francs for one contracted laborer. For 10,000 people transported, this amounted to 30 million francs. *Engagés* did not choose where to settle in the Mekong Delta but were instead "bought and sold" by owners of their contracts. In some cases, migrant families were separated, even mothers and children. One critique in the *Tribune Indochinoise* described:

> I have spoken about slavery: it is worse. The owner of slaves had interest to spare his livestock, which represented a value; on the other hand, he who buys a Tonkinese for 5 years sees every year the value of his purchase decreasing by a fifth. He thus may find it beneficial to draw from this purchase in 5 years all that

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[31] "De l'emploi la main-d'oeuvre tonkinoise et de la motoculture," *Tribune Indochinoise*. April 11, 1927, p. 1.

[32] "Commission permanente de 19 Juillet 1927: L'inspection Generale du Travail," *Tribune Indochinoise*, 24 August 1927, 3.

> he can give... What matters that the man is spent by this time, good for nothing? The master will not lose a penny there.[33]

89,000 persons emigrated in these work programs. 55,000 returned to the Red River Delta—most after the economic depression ruined many enterprises after 1930. Those who left as *engagés* typically worked in the more crowded regions of the delta such as the plantations surrounding Phụng Hiệp and Cần Thơ.[34]

These *engagés* from Tonkin developed a reputation in Cochinchina for being "unruly". One colonial French writer described a "psychologic factor" of the northern migrant:

> A Tonkinese coolie *obeys badly* in spite of coming to Cochinchina where one is unaware of the general Tonkinese mentality. According to us, therefore, the use of the Tonkinese laborer in the rice plantations is not to be advised, except that it can be likened to *tá canh* [wage laborers] and then it would be preferable to bring entire families...[35]

Part of the "trouble" with these workers was their isolation from their families in the north. Unlike free migrants who moved their entire household to settle in the south,

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[33] Ibid. "J'ai parlé de esclavage: c'est pire. Le propriétaire de esclaves avait intérêt à ménager son bétail, qui représentait une valeur, par contre, celui qui achête un Tonkinois pour 5 ans, voit tous les ans la valeur de son achat diminuer d'un cinquiôme. Il a donc intérêt à tirer de cet achat en 5 ans tout ce que il peut donner... Que importe que le homme soit à ce moment vidé, fine, bon à rien? Le maitre ne y perdra pas un sou."

[34] Gourou, *Les Paysans*, 218.

[35] "De l'emploi la main-d'oeuvre tonkinoise et de la motoculture," *Tribune Indochinoise*, April 11, 1927, 1. "Un coolie Tonkinoise <<obéit mal>> à un malgré Cochinchinoise d'abord parce que celui-ci ignore le plus souvent la mentalité Tonkinoise et ensuite et principalement parce qu'il est Cochinchinoise. D'apres nous, donc, l'emploi de la main-d'ouevre Tonkinoise <<dans les riziôres n'est pas à conseiller, sauf peut être dans le cas où l'on voudrait seulement des <<ta canh>> et alors il serait préférable de faire venir des familles entières...

engagés developed none of these ties except where they married into local families. Gourou's figure of 55,000 returning north after 1932 suggests that the majority of these workers preferred to return to their families and villages in Tonkin.[36]

Regulated immigration to Cochinchina played a more important role in the development of rubber plantations than on rice plantations. The majority of the northern work crews went to clear rubber plantations in the red clay hills north of Sài Gòn where they were less able to flee. Before 1927, northerners with money for travel could move freely to the Mekong Delta. This undocumented migration was probably the main source of population growth as the number of people grew from roughly 1 million in 1900 to 4 million in 1930. Colonial leaders moved to stop this flow of northern migrants after 1927, however, when local authorities began to worry about political agents coming to organize revolts.[37]

The severity of the agricultural crisis was largely due to this growing web of social conflict that preceded the economic crisis in 1930 and worsened after. Through "dualist" land policies, the colonial government in Cochinchina allowed a small oligarchy of powerful individuals to amass great fortunes of land at the expense of hundreds of thousands of squatters, tenants and migrants. Engineers' lack of

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[36] The Cochinchinese government may have also expedited their repatriation given fears of political unrest after the Nghệ Tĩnh Soviet in 1930-31.

[37] Trần Tư Bình, *The Red Earth: A Vietnamese Memoir of Life on a Colonial Rubber Plantation (Monographs in International Studies, Southeast Asia Series No. 66)*, David Marr, ed., John Spragens, Jr., trans (Athens OH: Ohio University, 1985).

understanding on the effects of the canals led to large areas of newly opened land becoming alternately flooded and burned. Floods in 1923, 1929 and 1937 catastrophically destroyed thousands of hectares of crops and exacerbated famines. The agricultural crisis also brought new public scrutiny through the Sài Gòn papers. Scientists and other researchers began to think of land development as a mixed problem, connecting politics and social well-being with physical conditions of the landscape.

The "Heroic" Tonkinese Peasant and the "Traditional" Tonkinese Landscape: Orientalist Hydraulic Environments

Part of the colonial scientific and intellectual response to the agricultural crisis was to compare water management and agriculture in the Mekong Delta with other agricultural regions, especially the Red River Delta in the north. Researchers sought to explain how Tonkinese peasants had managed for several hundred years to protect their fields from floods and achieve steady crop yields. Research on hydraulic agriculture in the late 1920's and early 1930's was influenced by strands of environmental determinism and Orientalism that sought to define "modes of production" that were specific both to river deltas and to Asian societies. The historian and geographer Karl Wittfogel published several important papers and two books during his tenure at the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research offering a Marxist analysis on the role of the environment in shaping human society. In his 1926 book *The Awakening China*, he emphasized the natural

rather than the social context of production and built upon Marx's term "Asiatic mode of production." He used this term to argue that Chinese society progressed through different stages of social organization and economy because of the importance of irrigation and a powerful hydraulic bureaucracy.[38] Though scholars in Europe and the Soviet Union debated these ideas, the assumption that the local environment played a central role in shaping traditional Asian societies pervaded colonial scholarship in this period.

Agricultural researchers and human geographers in Southeast Asia focused on traditional agricultural landscapes—especially in Mandalay, Java, Bali and Tonkin—in search of local modes of "traditional" agricultural production. They sought to identify local patterns of human-nature relationships in rural landscapes that defined "traditional" modes of production. The idea of a linked *traditional and natural* agricultural production was pervasive precisely because modernist, industrial agriculture in the south was failing. Still, this view of "traditional" agriculture was a colonial view—from the outside looking in over dikes, hedges, and walls to describe the interior structure of Vietnamese rural life.

The French School of the Far East (EFEO) in Hanoi was one of the most important centers for sponsoring and publishing this research in Indochina. French and some Vietnamese scholars conducted studies on religion, customs, ethnography, geography,

[38] Karl Wittfogel, *Das erwachende China* (Vienna: Agis Verlag, 1926). For a summary biography of Wittfogel, see Richard Peet, "Introduction to the Life and Thought of Karl Wittfogel," *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography* 17 No. 1 (1985), 3-20.

archaeology, and agriculture as part of their work with EFEO. One of the most famous studies published during thie period was Pierre Gourou's *Les Paysans du Delta Tonkinois* (1936).[39] With regard to water management in the Red River Delta, Gourou noted that local farmers assumed responsibility for building and maintaining local dikes. There was little need for state intervention in local flood prevention or irrigation. Instead, the colonial government in Tonkin focused on improving commercial navigation and flood protection around the city. [40]

One of the most impressive features of the Red River Delta landscape were the dikes encircling fields and villages that researchers called *casiers*. The sight of thousands of farmers *voluntarily* building the *casiers* to protect their fields and villages from flooding brought comparisons to constructing the pyramids of Egypt or the temples at Angkor Wat. Each dikes was built from millions of blocks of clay. Women carried smaller blocks in baskets while men carried larger blocks on their backs. Six or seven thousand

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[39] Pierre Gourou. *Les Paysans.*

[40] This period of agricultural research in Indochina influenced many intellectuals who later worked in politics both in Vietnam and France. Nguyễn Văn Huyền received his PhD in 1934 at the Sorbonne and then returned to Vietnam to conduct ethnographic research with EFEO. In 1945, he published *La Civilisation Annamite*, a work that described traditional Vietnamese society. He joined Hồ Chí Minh in 1945 and served as Minister of Education until 1975. In his 1945 publication, he noted of his French teachers, "We owe a great deal to our teachers, our predecessors and our friends." Nguyễn Văn Huyền, *The Ancient Civilization of Vietnam*, 8. The French researcher René Dumont was so impressed by his experiences studying agronomy in Tonkin that he later voiced his opposition to colonial rule after 1945. He promoted socialist agricultural reforms in Asia and Africa and was pivotal in establishing the Green Party in France. In 1974 he wrote a manifesto for political ecology in his bid for the French Presidency. For an internet resource on René Dumont with a complete bibliography and ongoing activities of the René Dumont Foundation visit http://www.fondation.rene-dumont.org/. René Dumont, *La culture du riz dans le delta du Tonkin : étude et propositions d'amélioration des techniques traditionnelles de riziculture tropicale* (Patani: Prince of Songkla University, 1995). Originally published in 1935.

people might engage in one construction project.[41] This effort was a communal duty, voluntary labor to preserve the community as a whole. *Casiers* in this context represented physical, environmental and social constructions with historical roots to the 11th century Lý Dynasty. Gourou also made the important observation that while dikes protected the delta from floods, they also complicated problems of drainage—in effect causing the floods to rise higher. At Hanoi, the Red River rose from its lowest level of 2.8 meters above sea level to 12 meters above sea level during floods. Houses and streets in the city were at about 9 meters above sea level, while the countryside was generally lower. Casiers limited damage to fields and towns by parcelling the landscape into separate cells surrounded by the dikes. Thus floods did not spread across entire regions as they did in the Mekong Delta; though water levels rose several meters above land inside the dikes. With each subsequent flood and with more dike construction, the threat of catastrophic flooding increased.[42]

During floods in the north, French researchers and officials often watched in amazement as teams of villagers worked through the night to strengthen the dikes. André Touzet, on a mission from the home office in Paris, described one such scene:

> One should see these instances of great danger that leave one speechless at the sudden build-up of the flood ... to size-up the fearsome mass of water rushing

[41] Gourou. *Les Paysans du Delta Tonkinois*, pp. 88-89.
[42] One of the earliest recorded major projects occurred in 1077 when the Lý Dynasty ordered construction of a dike along the Cầu River. See Phan Khánh, ed., *Sơ Thảo Lịch Sử Thủy Lợi Việt Nam, Tập 1* (Hà Nội: NXB Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1981), 32.

> six or eight meters above the plain, villages and cities .. it is necessary to witness the defense against this invading water, to have participated with these armies of courageous peasants who fight from *casier* to *casier*, desperately, to save life and possessions...[43]

He praised the genius and solidarity of northern peasants, suggesting even that there were hints of Goethe in this *oeuvre* but without the assistance of "diabolical sorcers."[44]

This portrayal of northern peasants as "heros" contrasted sharply with depictions of tenant farmers (many of them northern migrants) in Cochinchina. One observer blamed them for lacking patience in clearing new lands. People here appeared to move ceaselessly—especially in the western areas. They cleared fields and then abandoned them to cultivate elsewhere:

> "Rather than make an effort, tiny as it may be, they prefer to move in the province or to another, according to the climactic conditions, to put in culture lands possibly abandoned because they are too high or too low. The risks and the expenses that the *indigene* incurs because of these displacements are as large, if not more, than if he had remained on the plantation working just a little more."[45]

Tonkin represented a social, economic, and environmental alternative to the scene in the Mekong Delta.

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[43] André Touzet, *L'Economie Indochinoise et La Grand Crise Universelle* (Paris: Marcel Giard, 1934), 239-240. "Il faut avoir connu ces périods de grand menace où l'on suit haletant les progrés d'une crue; il faut avoir mesuré avec angoisse les masses formidables d'eau coulant à six ou huit métres au-dessus du niveau de la plaine, des villages et des villes; il faut avoir pris part à la défense contre l'eau envahissante, se être mêlé à ces armées de paysans courageux qui luttent de casier en casier, désespérément, pour sauver leurs biens et leur vie..."

[44] Ibid. 241.

[45] Normandin. *Travaux d'Hydraulique Agricole,* 15.

The comparison between the situation in Tonkin and the situation in the Mekong Delta fostered a new kind of state vision in Indochina, one that shifted from a preoccupation with a water network to one that was oriented to a pastoral model of land cultivation. Still, colonial planners pursued a kind of state vision that was relentless in that it attempted to artificially and forcefully relocate the new pastoral model into a very different ecological and social context in the Mekong Delta.[46]

The idealization of the Tonkinese *casier* as a model was supported also by new views from the air. Aerial photography allowed researchers to "peer over the village hedge" and look inside the formerly closed interiors of a Vietnamese village. (Figure 3.2) Until that time, especially in northern and central Vietnam, French officials and researchers typically did not participate in internal village affairs. The new spatial perspective allowed a rare glimpse inside, and Gourou and others used it to define and organize "village life" into new ideal categories based upon the patterns detected in the photos. Gourou's quote below indicates the sense of power that this new surveillance technology achieved:

> "In this Petri-like land of humanity, where man created everywhere the landscape such as we see it, the unity of the peasant population is powerful; the

[46] See James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 184-185. See also Michael Adas, "From Avoidance to Confrontation: Peasant Protest in Pre-Colonial and Colonial Southeast Asia," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23, No. 2 (1981): 217-247.

> natural uniformity of the deltaic country has also played no small part in creating a human unity. Natural uniformity and human unity, by aiding one another, have created a remarkably homogeneous land and a nation perfectly coherent."[47]

Gourou relates the flat surface of the Tonkinese landscape to the microscopic landscape of bacterial colonies expanding within the flat surface of the Petri dish. The aerial photo offered visual support to heavily determinist ideas of humans and nature connected into a homogenous "unity" where individuals were reduced to a microscopic dimension.

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[47] Gourou, *Les Paysans*, 14-15. "Dans ce pays pétri d'humanité, où l'homme créé partout le paysage tel que nous le voyons, cette unité de la population paysanne est un puissant facteur d'uniformité; et l'uniformité naturelle d'un pays deltaïque n'a pas peu contribué à créer cette unité humaine. Uniformité naturelle et unité humaine, en s'aidant l'une a l'autre, ont créé un pays remarquablement homogène et une nation parfaitement cohérent."



Figure 3.2: The Casier Landscape The image above is an aerial photograph of the Red River Delta detailing the apparent "cloissonée" of rice paddy encompassed by individual field dikes and then the taller *casier* of village dikes described by the thicker black lines in the photograph. At the top of the photo, an island-like village is surrounded by trees and hedges and is located on a hill above the floodplain. Gourou studied hundreds of aerial photos and then grouped villages into different types depending on their topographic and spatial configurations. Source: Pierre Gourou. *Les Paysans du Delta Tonkinnois*, Plate 36.

The geographer J.Y. Claeys described the power that aerial photos afforded by shifting the colonial gaze from the ground level to the bird's-eye view:

> On the ground, even traveling at low speed on the roads, one does not see into the villages; one sees of it the small woods and hedges of high bamboos. The aerial view transforms these screens into plumes of palms planted in crowns tightly around the houses. The plan of the village is extremely variable... Materially, the village is enclosed in its hedge of bamboos as hermetically as in its social rules... the greatest punishment that district prefects could inflict at the villages, as a collective punishment, was to make them raze this edge of bamboo. They still inflicted this sanction in the villages active at the time of the disorders of 1932 in the area of Vinh...
>
> The Tonkinese will always remain stubborn movers of earth. They were the ones who raised these dams and dikes that compartmentalize the delta into an infinity of *casiers*. In these *casiers*—Vidal de Blanc too quickly calls them "natural" forgetting the human side in human geography—the bird's-eye view shows that the Vietnamese agricultural landscape is born of the masses, a characteristic fact.[48]

Claeys redefined the landscape in visual terms. The bird's-eye view emphasized a symmetrical delineation of human life in an "infinity of casiers." The solution in the Mekong Delta was to reproduce this kind of human effort, advancing a similar symmetry across the barren landscapes where canals stretched for "hundreds of kilometers, absolutely fixed and lost to view."[49] The observations of geographers such

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[48] J.Y. Claeys, "La géographie humaine des pays Annamites basée sur des observations aériennes," *Cahiers de l'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient.* Number 22 (1940), 45. "Au sol, même sans excŏs de vitesse sur les routes, on ne voit pas les villages, on en voit que des boqueteaux et des haies de hauts bambous. La vision aérienne transforme ces écrans en panaches de palmes plantés en couronnes autour des maisons serrées. Le plan du village est extrêmement variable...Matériellement, le village est enclos dans sa haie de bambous aussi hermétiquement que dans ses rŏgles sociales...La plus grande punition que les préfets pouvaient infliger aux villages, coupables de fautes collectives, était de faire raser la lisiŏre de bambous. Cette sanction a encore été infligée aux villages particuliŏrement effervescents lors des troubles de 1932 dans la region de Vinh...le Tonkinois a toujours été, pour subsister, un obstiné remueur de terres. C'est lui qui a élevé ces digues et ces barrages qui compartimentent le delta en une infinité de casiers. Dans ces casiers, que VIDAL DE LA BLANCHE qualifie un peu trop rapidement de << naturels >>, oublient le côté humain de sa description de *géographie humaine*...l'aspect "à vol d'oiseau" de la campagne annamite est d'une régularité de masses à fait caractéristique."

[49] Ibid., 46. "La progrés joue sans doute en faveur de la symitrisation des formes."

as Claeys were in keeping with the older traditions of natural history and travel writing observation of the 19th century. Through the medium of aerial photography, this latter generation of observers was continuing a tradition of what Mary Louise Pratt calls "transculturation," where European views transformed the understood logic of natural and human processes.[50]

Struggling to make sense of land abandonment in the western Mekong Delta, local administrators and researchers adopted the belief that stable crop yields were associated with smaller land parcels and denser populations. One administrator in Long Xuyên noted that small landowners in Mỹ Tho and Vĩnh Long doubled and sometimes tripled the 1-ton-per-hectare average yield.[51] He contrasted this pastoral ideal with the situation on the plantations in Long Xuyên. The ideal view was:

> "a typical picture of Vietnamese fields, where houses stand in the rice fields surrounded by bamboo and fruit trees. This is an extremely verdant landscape, very fragmented, where the view is broken at each instant by lines of trees."[52]

The contrasting view was that of a treeless horizon with scattered clumps of "floating rice" growing in flooded fields. Houses here built against the banks of the canal and

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[50] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992). Particularly in Chapter 6, "Alexander von Humboldt and the reinvention of América," she describes how von Humboldt's publication of 30 volumes on South America defined European and modern South American ideas of culture and nature in the region.

[51] Xacat, "Riziculture et Hydraulique Agricole," 29 August 1944, TTLTQG2, TDBCPNV, H.6/20.

[52] André Fraisse, "Notes de Géographie Humaine sur la Province de Long-Xuyên," *Extrait du Bulletin de l'Institut Indochinois pour l'Etude de l'Homme* (Séance du 26 mai 1942), 140.

roadway. Workers came in small boats and built temporary houses here. If their contracts were not renewed, then they demolished the house and carried it's wooden piers to the next destination. Plantation owners failed to encourage tenants to settle permanently: "They never settle definitively, and consequently, what good is it to build a garden and to plant fruit trees or bamboos from which others would profit?"[53] These observations however neglected the unique conditions of flooding here. Flooding had limited permanent settlement in the region for centuries, not only recently. Roads and canal banks also complicated the issue, protecting land on the downstream side of the flood and causing it to deepen on the other.[54]

"Scientific" *Casiers* In The Mekong Delta

The term "casier" held a very different meaning in the Mekong Delta. Instead of describing a natural-human "unity" of dikes, fields and villages, it most often referred to the "scientific" grids of canals and land parcels constructed by colonial engineers. Traditional, indigenous farming patterns in the Mekong Delta were most often associated with the natural, *unmanaged* landscape of tidal creeks and rivers. Unlike Tonkin, there was less need for the scale of construction and water management common in the north. "Traditional" water management depended on the daily pulsing of water through tidal creeks and smaller canals.

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[53] Ibid.
[54] Paul Emery, "Etude sur les Travaux d'Hydraulique Agricole dans le Trans-Bassac," 20 October 1942, TTLTQG2, TDBCPNV H.62/3.

The association between colonial water management in the south and indigenous water management in the north was based on a belief that more intensive management of soils and water would stabilize agricultural productivity. This association neglected the physical differences in soils and hydrology and the fact that population density in the Mekong Delta was still a fraction of that in the Red River Delta. Colonial engineers, especially in the 1930's, hoped that they might rapidly reconstruct the *natural* casier landscape of Tonkin through mechanical and artificial means in the Mekong Delta.

One of the models for this artificial sort of *casier* was the Gressier Estate. In 1903 Rémy Gressier established a rice mill and plantation of 5600 hectares along 14 km of the newly completed Xà No Canal (14 x 2 square km on both flanks). Sluice gates and water pumps linked a primary grid of irrigation canals in 1-km segments. The pumps drained the fields even when water levels outside the dikes were higher and they irrigated the fields even when outside water levels were lower. The main plantation was a kind of terrestrial "chessboard" (Figure 3.3).[55] At each 1-km intersection on Xà

[55] Gressier's total holdings varied with land sales over the years, but his firm's total holdings may have exceeded 140 square kilometers (14,000 hectares) during the "agricultural crisis." An exact figure is difficult to assess because land was both sold and purchased at different times. The "casier" of Gressier Land, however, was controlled by Gressier and his heirs until 1945. The Gressier Concession was originally formed by the former Administrator of Rạch Giá, Guéry, who requested the land in 1899 and then sold it to the Gressier company. *Plan Topographie de la Province de Cantho. 1/100.000* (Hanoi: *Société Geographique de l'Indochine, 1925*). 2800 hectares (7x4 kilometers) were located on the Cần Thơ side of Xà No and approximately 2800 hectares were located in Rạch Giá Province. An unpublished 1963 map of land holdings still claimed by French nationals shows the same area in Cần Thơ and Chương Thiện Provinces was still claimed by Gressier heirs. A 1936 provincial monograph lists the total size of Gressier holdings as 12,049 hectares. Adding 2800 hectares from Cần Thơ gives a total of 14,849

No Canal, hamlets were established with names that corresponded to their distance from the property boundary at Nhơn Nghĩa: One Thousand Hamlet [Ấp Một Ngàn], Two Thousand Hamlet [Ấp Hai Ngàn], etc. ending at Fourteen Thousand Hamlet. Eight Thousand Hamlet was the location for the company's central offices, a towering cement rice mill, shipping docks, and later a small airstrip. The company headquarters was situated on the provincial border between Cần Thơ and Rạch Giá Provinces.[56] At each hamlet intersection, the company operated general stores that took company scrip paid to tenants for their rice. In 1908, Gressier opened an agricultural training school in hopes of turning out future managers willing to oversee further modernization of the estate; disappointingly most of the rural youth educated in accounting and office management left to fill more exciting urban clerical posts.[57]

A local mill owner living near the old estate recalled life on these large company plantations:

> Before '45, there were some big plantations like Cơ Đỏ of Huỳnh Kỳ in the Mekong Delta, Gressier in Xà No, and some other large French plantations in Bạc Lieu... They all had technology—machinery, water pumps, and ploughs. When landlords lent land to farmers, farmers just bought buffaloes to plough their fields—they did not use any machines. Agriculture developed up to the edge of each rectangular plot [*casier*]. The plantations developed faster than other land... Gressier cleared several thousand hectares in this region, expanded

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hectares owned by the Gressier Estate, probably from the early 1900's to 1945. See "Monographie de Rach-Gia," TTLTQG2, TDBCPNV E.02/71.

[56] Based on personal trips and consultation of maps and aerial photos taken by the US Army after 1945. The airstrip was abandoned after 1954, and the US military built a larger military airstrip at Vị Thanh nearby. The mill structure still stands today, and the Gressier name can be seen under the paint at the top of this factory. The villages along the canal are still named One Thousand, Two Thousand, etc. in this fashion.

[57] Pierre Brocheux, *The Mekong Delta,* 133.

> his plantation, dug canals like a chessboard... All water was conducted through this rectangular scheme, and all canals had dikes. When they wanted to bring water in, they turned the flap gate in; when they wanted to rinse water out, they turned the flap gate out... They turned the flap gates out when the harvest came to clear the water and dry the fields. At low tide water drained out; at high tide [the flap gates blocked it so that] it could not enter. The system was perfect because it covered the whole area. They could decide the field to be dry or wet easily... Very scientific...[58]

In hydrologic and agricultural terms, Gressier's operation was successful, though few planters could afford the machines and labor necessary to maintain such a *casier* on their own. The planter Robert Labaste experimented with water pumps and dikes around his much smaller plantation at Phụng Hiệp, and he built a mill at Saintenoy and Nàng Mau Canals. After consecutive years of flooding from 1909 to 1912, however, he sold the pumps and reduced his holdings.[59]

In describing the failed agricultural projects in Long Xuyên, colonial observers did not generally dismiss the plantation system altogether. Gressier's estate and other examples of "scientific management" were relatively productive and stable. They demonstrated that investments of sufficient technology and labor might eventually pay off. The fault

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[58] Ông Diều, Interview 8, April 19, 2002. [375-462] "Trươc 45 DBSCL có mấy đồn điền lớn như đồn điền Tây ở Cờ Dỏ, đồn của Hùynh Kỳ, Kinh Xà No có đồn của Gressier, ở Bạc Liêu cũng có đồn điền Tây. Những đồn điền đó tương đối có kỹ thuật, máy móc, máy bơm, máy cày. Lần lần những điền này khóan trắng cho nông dân mướn dất ruộng mua trâu về cày làm, chứ không có máy móc gì. Thời dó nông nghiệp cũng phát triển theo khung, khung nào có đồn điền thì phát triển dược. [khung = casier = rectangular plan]...Những đồn điền đó do Pháp khai khẩn, cho chính phủ Pháp, ví dụ như Anh Gressier khai khẩn mấy
ngàn hecta vùng này, mở rộng đồn điền, đào kinh giáp vòng, xẻ như bàn cờ...Tất cả nước đưa vô khung này, mấy vàm kinh này đều có đập hết, dẫn nước vô. Nó cần đem nước vô thì nó để mặt bọng này ở phía trong, lúc xả nước ra không cho nước ngòai vô thì để mặt bọng phía ngòai.

[59] Services Agricoles et Commerciaux, "Visite Faite Les 1er et 2 Mai à l'Exploitation Rizicole de M. Labaste," 29 May 1912, TTLTQG2, Fonds Goucoch IB 25/124.

with the western plantations in Long Xuyên and Đồng Tháp was that landowners failed to invest in constructing such infrastructure and also that these estates occupied more flood-prone land.

The government attempted to remedy the problem in Long Xuyên by investing in a "chessboard" type of hydraulic grid that would serve as a resettlement *casier* for landless tenants along the new canals. This was an attempt to curb unrest in other provinces and to remedy past hydraulic failures through a more intensive, micro-managed hydraulic system resembling the Gressier Estate. From 1930-1933, the government granted 5-hectare and 10-hectare plots of land in the western reaches of Long Xuyên to predominantly Khmer people who had lost their ancestral lands in Cà Mau, Cần Thơ, Sóc Trang and Bạc Liêu. Public Works constructed the primary grid of canals before the migrants (called *petit colons*) arrived.

Hundreds of families rushed to gain legal title on the Tri Tôn, Rạch Giá – Hà Tiên, and Ba Thê Canals. Demand far exceeded the available number of lots, requiring use of a lottery system to distribute parcels. The government prohibited settlements within 1 km of major canal intersections, reserving this space for police, navigational constructions, and commercial leases. Inside these interior water grids, settlers cleared more than 100,000 hectares in just three years. Land clearing was aided by disastrous fires that incinerated the peat soil below the trees; but concerned by the increasing dredging costs

and the rapid loss of forests here, the government closed the project in 1933.[60] Large tracts of state-owned forest were now reduced to ashes, and within a few years, many migrants left the land fallow because of floods and increased acidity. The dredging contractor also reduced its operations to 25% capacity in 1934 at the worst of the economic crisis.[61]

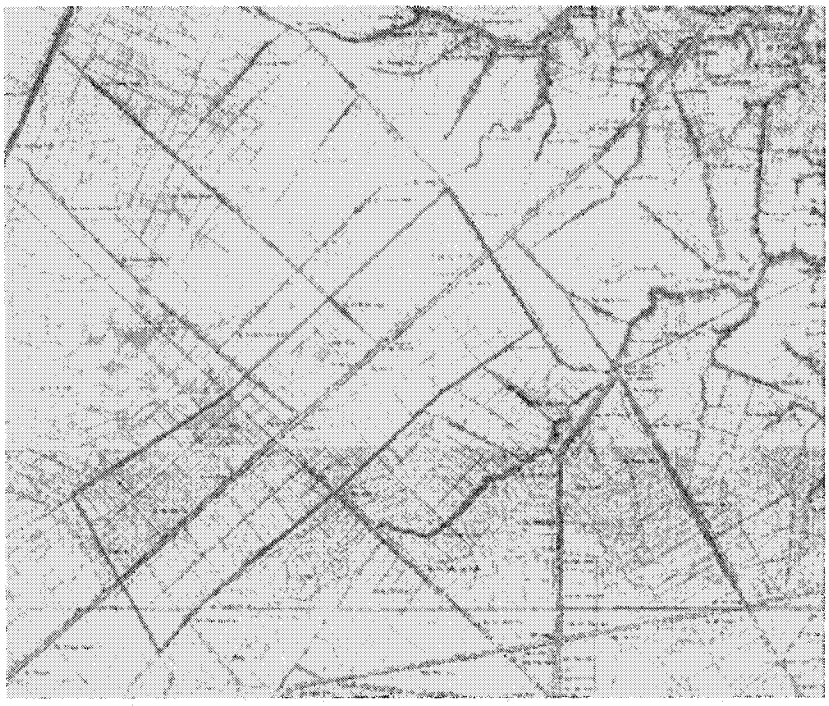


Figure 3.3: Gressier Estate: The red lines (added for emphasis) describe the approximate bounds of the Gressier Estate along the Xà No Canal in the Cần Thơ area. The thinner blue lines describe canals spaced approximately 0.5 km apart. Each canal crossing the Xà No Canal at 1000-meter intervals still carries its original name (One Thousand Canal, Two Thousand Canal, etc.) Eight Thousand Canal marked the

[60] Administrator of Rạch Giá to Governor of Cochinchina, 7 December 1932, TTLTQG2, Fonds Goucoch IB23/096 (19).

[61] Annual expenditures for dredging from 1930 to 1937 were as follows: 1930: 1.75m piasters; 1931: 1.75m piasters; 1932: 1.4m piasters; 1933: .8m piasters; 1934: .4m piasters; 1935: .4m piasters; 1936: .45m piasters; 1937: .4m piasters. "Dragages dans les canaux de Cochinchine: Concours pour l'exécution de travaux de dragages en Cochinchine pour une période de dix ans," TTLTQG2, Fonds Goucoch VIA 8/186(31).

central location where the mill, offices and airstrip were located. It is represented in this figure by a heavier black line that crosses the estate diagonally from the bottom center of the image to the top left. The villages of Nhon Ái and Nhơn Nghĩa were along the original Xà No Creek that is shơn in this figure as a heavy dark line crossed by the Xà No Canal to the right of the outlined area. Sources: Army Mapping Service 1963 L7014 Series and 1965 Pictomap L8021 Series. The boundaries for the property are based on descriptions from oral accounts, older colonial maps of the original concession, and canal names on this map that match these other accounts.

Despite the environmental and social problems, this type of government-sponsored settlement project garnered diverse political support in the 1930's. Reform groups in Sài Gòn advocated for more of these *casiers* to reduce political tensions and poverty in the provinces. During a brief era in 1938-39 when Vietnamese political parties were legally permitted to organize, the Parti Democrate Indochinois—a moderate, reformist group in Sài Gòn—petitioned the governor to continue the settlements:

> This work, the utility and urgence of which are shown by the havoc of the flood, is likely to bring work and an immediate help to the populations of the disaster victims... From the political point of view, this convenient gesture of the authorities, coming to the assistance of populations who have proven their work to be valuable, will have a considerable effect. Regarding social aspects, we know too well how misery is often a bad adviser. He risks to be exploited by adversaries of the current regime, partisans of the class struggle and enemies more or less declared against French influence in Indochina. They will be too happy to appeal to the worst instincts, on a ground already prepared by disappointments and deprivations, to destroy the social order...[62]

[62] "Le President du Parti Democrate Indochinois a Monsieur le Gouverneur de la Cochinchine," 6 April 1938, TTLTQG2, Fonds Goucoch VIA 8/207(21). "Ces travaux, dont l'utilité et l'urgence sont démontrées par les méfaits de l'inondation, sont de nature à apporter du travail et une aide immédiate aux populations des régions sinistrées...Au point de vue politique, le geste opportun des pouvoirs publics, venant en aide aux populations éprouvées sous forme de travaux utiles au premier chef, aura un retentissement considérable. Sur le plan social, nous savons trop bien comment la misôre est souvent mauvaise conseillôre. Elle risque d'être exploitée par des adversaires du régime actuel, partisans de la lutte des classes et ennemis plus ou moins déclarés de l'influence franâaise en Indochine. Ils seront trop heureux de faire appel aux pires instincts, sur un terrain déjà préparé par les déceptions et les privations, pour déstruire un ordre social..."

The old coalition of entrepreneurs, engineers, bureaucrats and landowners was changing to include in varying degrees the influence of political activists, agricultural researchers, and displaced tenants. The technical and social dimensions of the program were still contested in 1938, but as conditions continued to worsen in 1939, *casiers* became a model for small-scale agricultural development.

The government had also established a rural engineering corps or Genie Rurale in 1936 to focus on agricultural improvements within these new *casiers* at agricultural field stations. The Genie Rurale was to support economic and technical improvements of agriculture from local field stations organized in distinct agro-ecological sectors and centered in what were to become new agricultural *casiers*. Unlike the hydraulic engineers and the dredging operators in Sài Gòn, these agricultural engineers were part of a rural tradition in France that supported decentralization and forms of social engineering that benefited small landholders. A fall 1944 map of the Genie Rurale's operations in Cochinchina describes rice research projects at numerous locations that were later sites for state irrigation and settlement projects. In particular, the map highlights two key *casiers* for more research in Long Xuyên and at Phước Long. The village of the 1926 uprising, Ninh Thanh Lợi , was located just south of Phước Long. This area was prone to flooding. (Figure 3.4)

The governor reorganized Public Works in 1938, the first such reorganization since the powerful department's inception in 1881. The hydraulic engineering section in Public Works became a *Service d'Hydraulique Agricole et de Navigation de Sud-Indochine* (*HANSI*). This was at least a formal recognition that the needs for irrigation and transportation were often contradictory. HANSI's hydraulic engineers began work in separate offices responsible for navigation, irrigation, rice research, and the settlement *casiers*.[63] The separation of function, however, did not result in any fundamental changes in their centralized approach to water management. HANSI engineers continued to push for centralized control of irrigation projects and land development.[64]

[63] "Fonctionnement du Sce. Hydraulique Agricole," 22 July 1938, TTLTQG2, Goucoch Divers 2129.
[64] "Detail Estimatif des Travaux (Cubes Minima Garantie par l'Administration)," TTLTQG2, Fonds Goucoch VIA 8/186(31).



Figure 3.4: 1944 Agricultural Research Projects and Proposed Casiers. The above map shows the location for planned and active rice research projects in the Mekong Delta. The red areas (added for emphasis) describe the outlines for major agricultural *casier* that the government hoped to develop at Long Xuyên and Phước Long. Source: TTLTQG2, TDBCPNV Folio H62/14.

Vichy Debates on the Hydraulic Landscape and the Construction of *Casiers*

Tonkinoises

The fall of the Third Republic on June 17, 1940 and the subsequent establishment of a Vichy government in Indochina resulted in the isolation of left-leaning colonial

bureaucrats and the violent suppression of Vietnamese nationalists. The five years of Vichy administration to 1945 are perhaps the least understood in Vietnam's colonial history, and with respect to rural development in the Mekong Delta land development was more complex than a characterization of repression. Historians typically describe Vichy wartime repression with the aftermath of the Nam Kỳ Uprising in November 1940. On November 23, 1940, communist party organizers in Mỹ Tho Province and other locations across Cochinchina seized control of rural government offices and garrisons. These brief victories for the communists were followed by brutal military repression and imprisonment. Historian Nguyễn Khắc Viên claims that over 20,000 people were killed or imprisoned in the violence of 1940.[65]

Wartime demands of the Vichy government and its Japanese military rulers caused widespread shortages of basic supplies and fuel. Interviews with elder farmers confirm David Elliott's description that the countryside "fell into darkness, both figuratively and literally."[66] The Japanese military controlled fuel, fabric and medicine; supplies for these basic goods essentially dried up for several years. One farmer described kerosene and cloth shortages after 1943:

> In the South, especially in '43 & '44, when the Japanese kicked the French out of Viet Nam, there was no kerosene, no fuel, so we used *mù u* [*Callophyllum*

[65] For a detailed account of revolutionary activities, especially in Mỹ Tho Province, see David W.P. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta 1930-1975,* Volume 1 (Armonk NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), 40-42. Also see Nguyễn Khắc Viên, *Vietnam: A Long History*, 225.
[66] Elliott, *The Vietnamese War,* 33.

> *inophyllum*] nuts for a lamp. We cut the nut into small pieces, dried it, then burned it. Sometimes we used pig fat or mouse fat to burn. We just used it a while for dinner only.
>
> ...at that time we didn't even have clothes, so we saved our mosquito nets for clothes, because at that time we didn't sleep in the mosquito nets any more. No one could buy new clothes, and our old clothes were worn out and torn after 2 or 3 years. Mosquito nets were used to make outfits for women while men just wore shorts. We also washed sacks to wear as a shirt without sleeves...there was no cloth, no kerosene, people died of diseases (in '43, '44, '45, '46) like malaria, cholera, they died because they did not have food and medicines.[67]

During this period of poverty, starvation, and repression, the Vichy government pressed its engineers and planners to remedy the situation with new social engineering efforts.

A debate emerged between members of the Genie Rurale and HANSI over the causes of the crisis. The agricultural engineers criticized Public Works, blaming the agency for its failures to construct waterways and develop the delta in any logical fashion. In a paper titled "Problem du Riz" they criticized plantation owners and Public Works engineers for their absence from actual work on the land. They described a local perspective on dredging:

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[67] Interview 7, Ông Bảy Long, April 20, 2002. [433-498]. "Ở Nam Bộ, nhất là thời kỳ 43, 44 lúc Nhật vô đuổi Pháp, dầu lửa không có, ống quẹt đá không có, đốt đèn bằng trái mù u. Chặt ra mỏng, phơi khô, xỏ lại, đốt. Cách khác là dùng mỡ heo đốt, mỡ chuột ... Tối đốt ăn cơm chút thôi. Hồi đó không có ống quẹt, phải dùng hai cục đá khô cho nó văng lửa. Lấy miếng gòn dể ở dưới...Gặp trời nắng mồ nó cháy nhanh, gặp trời mưa mồ hòai không cháy, có khi muốn nấu cơm sớm mà không có lửa trễ...Lúc đó quần áo vải cũng không có. Bấy giờ chỉ có một vải mùng, vì lúc đó không còn ngủ mùng nữa. Vì lúc đó không ai sắm quần áo hết nên đồ cũ một hai ba năm rách hết. Vải mùng dể may quần áo cho đàn bà, đàn ông chỉ 1 cái quần cụt. Bao bố giặt sạch làm áo mặc, không có tay...Không có vải, không có dầu, con người sanh bệnh chết nhiều (43,44,45,46) vì sốt rét, dịch tả, thiếu thuốc, thiếu ăn!"

> There is always the risk to see, one day, one's efforts destroyed by a modification of water resources in an entire region, or even more by the execution of one significant work, not envisaged at the appropriate time and whose repercussions had obviously not been considered at the time of secondary installations.[68]

The large waterways had come to represent ecological folly, as Public Works engineers had not sufficiently planned for the contingent effects of a new waterway on existing lattices of secondary works. Genie Rural proponents argued that Public Works engineers used no extensive logic in the designs of their projects:

> In the course of fiery meetings at the Colonial Council a certain number of Vietnamese Councillors asked the Administration to dig channels crossing their grounds, and the Administration for political reasons met their request. It is obvious that they created the system of channels bric-a-brac for sentimental and political reasons...[69]

The agricultural engineers argued that *irrigation* should fall under local administrative jurisdiction, as had happened with the Génie Rurale in France. They claimed that Public Works engineers and the dredging Enterprise did not understand locally

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[68] Hoeffel, "Le Riz," TTLTQG2, TDBCPNV H6/20, 3. "Puis il y a toujours le risque de voir, un jour, annihiler les efforts accomplis par une modification du régime hydraulique de toute une région, ou bien encore par l'exécution de un travail important, non prévu en temps voulu et dont les répercussions n'avaient évidemment pas été envisagées à l'époque des aménagements secondaires."

[69] Xacat, "Riziculture et Hydraulique Agricole," 29 August 1944, TTLTQG2, TDBCPNV H.6/20, 1. "...qu'a cours des séances de feu le Conseil Colonial un certain nombre de conseillers annamites demandaient à l'Administration de faire creuser des canaux traversant leurs terres, et l'Administration pour des raisons dites politiques, accédait à leur demande. Il est évident qu'une systôme de canaux crée de bric et de broc pour des raisons sentimentales et politiques."

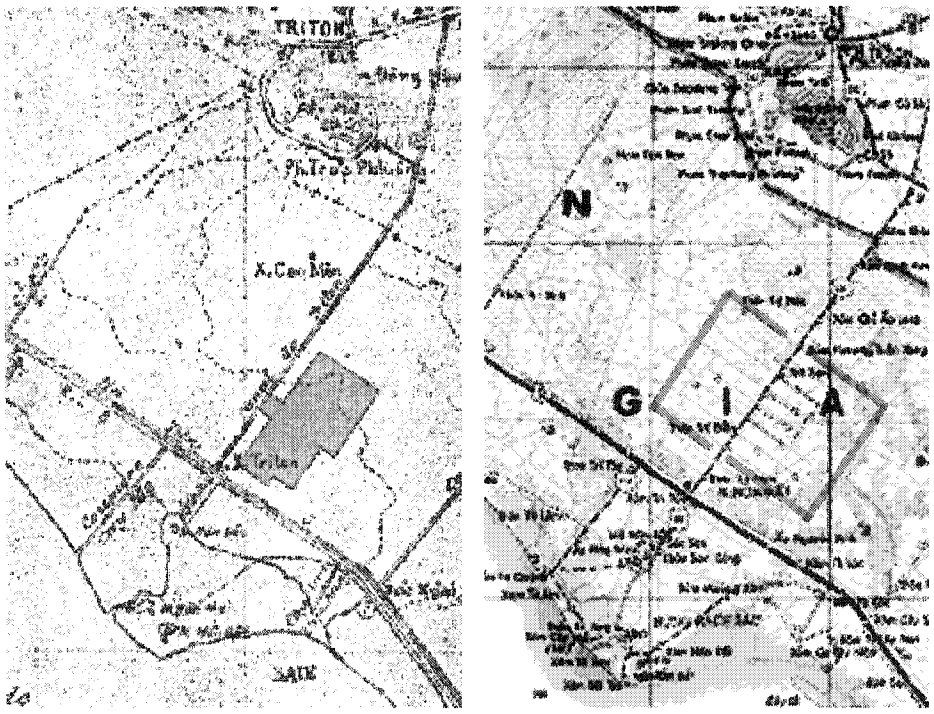
complicated questions of an agricultural nature; instead they tended to expand new canals to serve speculative interests of powerful landowners living in Sài Gòn.[70]

Meanwhile HANSI engineers argued the opposite case in support for more centrally-managed projects. They discredited the agricultural engineers on technical grounds and for writing such "pessimistic reports" with catastrophic conclusions such as "la Cochinchine toute entière est menacée".[71] Engineer Bigorgne re-interpreted rice statistics to argue that ten-year averages from 1924-34 and 1934-44 had actually increased from 2 million tons to 2.9 million tons. Annual outputs also varied due to natural conditions, especially in years of high floods or long droughts. He attributed irrigation problems and abandoned lands in part to local practices in the newly-opened regions. Unlike farmers in Tonkin, farmers in the Mekong Delta irrigated fields with rainwater, refusing to build irrigation and drainage channels in cooperation with neighbors.[72] Ultimately, Vichy supported HANSI's plans. HANSI proposed construction of new settlement casiers that went far beyond the projects in 1930. They proposed relocating peasants directly from the north onto new experimental settlement regions in Long Xuyên not far from the earlier Khmer settlements.

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[70] Ibid., 7.
[71] Bigorgne, "L'Hydraulique Agricole en Cochinchine," . 25 August 1944, TTLTQG2, TDBCPNV H.6/20, 1.
[72] Ibid., 5.

HANSI engineers drafted plans for a *Premiere Casier Tonkinoise* in 1943 (Figure 3.5).[73] The plan this time combined the "genius" of Tonkinese peasants with an infrastructure that would be first constructed with mechanical dredges, diesel water pumps, and mechanical technology of French enterprises. This was to serve as a model settlement, attracting others to copy the same landscape patterns. In keeping with what Eric Jennings describes as the "neotraditional" tendencies of Vichy, the Casier Tonkinoise was an attempt to rapidly convert the Mekong Delta landscape into a *casier* landscape of Tonkin but mixed with modern machinery—even a proposed sports stadium.[74]



[73] L'Ingenieur en Chef de la Circonscription d'Hydraulique Agricole et de Navigation de Sud-Indochine (HANSI) a Monsieur le Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, 1 September 1943, TTLTQG2, TDBCPNV BO/3904.

[74] Eric T. Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-1944* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 170.

Figure 3.5: Casier Tonkinoise. Beginning in 1943, the Vichy government resettled over 7000 Tonkinese into a constructed grid of canals adjacent to the Tri Ton Canal. The 1943 map of the Premiere Casier Tonkinoise (left) shows the placement of the first *casier* with the required 1-km clearance along the banks of the main canal for commercial and government use. In late 1944, crews began construction of a second grid on the opposite bank of the main canal across from the first settlement. The 1977 map (right) shows the remnant canals of both projects. The later map shows that much of the land belonging to these projects had reverted to marsh, especially on the eastern side. Sources (Left): 1 September 1943. "Amenagement du Premiere Casier Tonkinois." L'Ingenieur en Chef de la Circonscription d'Hydraulique Agricole et de Navigation de Sud-Indochine (HANSI) a Monsieur le Gouverneur de la Cochinchine. TTLTQG2. TDBCPNV Folio BO/3904. Source (Right): "Long Xuyen NC 48-6". 1/250.000 Topographical Map. 4th Edition. Hanoi: Map Publishing House (1983).

Workers completed the main canals in the *Premiere Casier Tonkinois* on August 20, 1943, near the junction of the Tri Tôn Canal and the Rạch Giá - Hà Tiên Canal. The Tonkinese immigrants and local workers together had dredged a grid of irrigation canals 13 km by 3 km. The government chose 750 families (approximately 3800 people) to voluntarily move there from Thái Bình and Nam Định Provinces. The emigrants received new clothes, mosquito netting, raincoats and hats, blankets, and matting upon arrival. Each family received a 5-hectare lot upon finishing work on the main canals. They received a hot meal upon arrival, one month's supply of food, cooking supplies, farming tools, and a small boat. Besides these personal amenities, the government established a school, an administrative center, a market, and a *đình*. A stadium was to be built later in the year. The *casier* would then serve as a focal attraction for independent migration.[75]

[75] L'Ingenieur en Chef de la Circonscription d'Hydraulique Agricole et de Navigation de Sud-Indochine (HANSI) a Monsieur le Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, 1 September 1943, TTLTQG2, TDBCPNV BO/3904.

Within a year of the project's construction, farmers had cleared one third of the land, removing and burning twisted malaleuca stumps before they planted rice. Unfamiliar with either the tidal or flooding regimes, they dug deep canals to drain waters outside of protective field dikes. In this way, they avoided flooding. As the dry season caused water levels to drop in the spring, however, they were unable to bring enough water left into the fields. The rice crop then suffered from drought and the buildup of alum. The government spent more than 175,000 piasters on the experimental project in just one year.[76] Believing that in one more year this first *casier* would be self-sufficient, the government started a *Casier Tonkinois* II in 1945. This area duplicated the grid of the first *casier*; and immigrants arrived several months later, just as the Việt Minh claimed independence for Việt Nam in August 1945.[77] Work on the projects stopped with the Vichy government's collapse in March 1945, post-war struggles with the Việt Minh, and the violent restoration of French control after 1946.

Despite the failure of the project after 1945, the *Casier Tonkinois* did catch the attention of the U.S. Government through the efforts of Henry Field, director of a secret wartime study on migration and food shortages called the "M Project" and an anthropologist graduated from Oxford in 1925. A member of the family that founded the Field Museum in Chicago where he worked as an assistant curator, he joined Roosevelt's

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[76] L'administrateur, chef de la province de Rachgia a Monsieur le Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, 22 January 1945, TTLTQG2, TDBCPNV BO/3904.
[77] Budget Generale: Amenagement de la Region Rach-Gia – Ha-Tien, 25 January 1945, TTLTQG2, TDBCPNV BO/3904.

administration in 1941 as a member of the Special Intelligence Unit. Field's staff focused on problems of settlement and migration around the world, believing that the next World War would stem from poverty and political upheavals in overpopulated, starving regions of the world. American planners were especially worried that the masses would be more susceptible to political recruitment by the Soviet Union, especially in Asia and Africa. The "M Project" was to provide expert advice in the government's plans to aid relocation of displaced peoples at the end of World War II. After Roosevelt's death, the project continued to 1946 until President Truman transferred the reports into a new project called "Point IV" that later was folded into USAID.[78]

Though French engineers abandoned the *casiers* as military forces fought for control of the territory, the idea of *casiers* as a hydraulic and social engineering model persisted. HANSI engineers had drawn up plans for larger, future *casiers* in Đồng Tháp, Long Xuyên, Bạc Liêu, and U Minh/Cà Mau. They believed that these projects would ultimately permit them to "fix the type of water management for the region".[79] *Casiers* represented the perfect compromise for appeasing rural peasants and stabilizing agricultural development. Like the large canals before them, they would also require

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[78] The entire collection of "M Project" reports can be found at the Library of Congress and as part of the Henry Field Papers, Collection Number 72, University of Miami, Otto G. Richter Library Archives and Special Collections Department. See No. T-109. "Studies of Migration and Settlement: Translation Series – Tonkinese Settlement in Cochinchina, October 20, 1945."

[79] Jamme, "Amenagement de la Plaine des Joncs: Avant-Projet," 20 July 1943, TTLTQG2, TDBCPNV H.62/7, 14.

the input of engineers and continuing use of mechanical dredges, pumps, and even farm equipment.

Conclusion

Casier landscapes were the product of hydraulic failures, a worsening political and economic situation, and new ideas supported with the visual props of aerial photography. Hydraulic engineers believed that they could recreate a version of the historic Tonkinese landscape by simply digging the channels, erecting some communal buildings, and physically transporting thousands of Tonkinese peasants to live inside this artificial interior. The *Casier Tonkinoise* was a kind of social experiment that could have never happened in France, even after the devastation of WWII. The tight, rectangular grid of canals and the relocation of 7000 *petit colons* was a kind of translation from Gourou's Petri dish idea of model landscapes.

In constructing these settlement areas, colonial planners attempted to change the form of agricultural life in the Mekong Delta, but without solving social conditions that continued to worsen for most rural families in the 1940's. Larger landowners had grown stronger rather than weaker in this era—buying up even more land after smaller landowners filed bankruptcy. The delta became a center for revolutionary activities. Groups associated with Ho Chi Minh's Youth Union and Southern political figures such

as Trần Văn Giấu established local headquarters in some of the poorest areas—advocating to redistribute the land in "land to the tiller" campaigns.

The weak voice of critics, such as some of the agricultural engineers in Genie Rurale, is historically interesting even though their potential role in rural development was quickly subsumed under the influence of the Public Works/HANSI engineers. The presence of their reports points to critiques within the colonial bureaucracy. This was a bureaucracy complicated by major political changes in France and its overseas territories from the victories of Socialists to their replacement by Vichy Fascists. These political swings inevitably left individuals and offices in the government isolated. The colonial bureaucracy also changed in this period to include more indigenous scholars, engineers and social scientists who had graduated from elite French universities. After the outbreak of war with the Việt Minh in 1946, many of these scholars followed the Revolution, taking their ideas of social science, environment and landscape with them.

Colonial ideas about the landscape, particularly the new form of settlement *casier* in the Mekong Delta, were not ideologically or even politically bound. Ideas of "scientific management" were not incompatible with the anti-colonial campaigns of Vietnamese nationalists or radicals. In newspaper critiques, they often suggested *casiers* as a peaceful means of relocating the poorest farmers and a form of wage labor contract to replace the imprecise regime of landlord-tenant arrangements. Supporters of the French

state after 1945 would continue to hold up these model constructions as evidence of "progress" just as the Governor General had claimed on the banks of the new canal at Rạch Giá in 1930. The Mekong Delta environment was bound, however, by persistent problems in land ownership, the political power of plantations, and the bureaucratic power of engineers and French entrepreneurs.

In the process of translating the idealized, bird's-eye view of the Tonkinese landscape to the "abandoned lands" of Long Xuyên and Đồng Tháp, an understanding of the historic social and political relations that shaped that landscape was lost. Colonial officials could not allow the Tonkinese traditions of smaller landholdings, communal property, and village autonomy to spread in the Mekong Delta. "Miền Tây Society" was built on an industrial agriculture model controlled by powerful landlords operating "scientific" estates. The French decision to sideline traditional Vietnamese land ownership into a separate legal category from French land ownership rapidly diminished the authority of "traditional" institutions. Re-establishing such patterns of "traditional" landownership and village culture after fifty years of "dualism" in Cochinchina was an impossible proposal. At best, planners might have achieved a form of "neotraditionalism," reinventing a traditional past within a modernist framework. Projects such as the *Casier Tonkinoise* were physical reflections of this sentiment in the hydraulic landscape. They borrowed certain characteristics from a perceived "natural" and "traditional" landscape

while they were inevitably subject to the colonial politics of land ownership and water management in the Mekong Delta.

CHAPTER IV: LIBERATED ZONES, CONTROLLED NETWORKS AND COLD WAR EXPERIMENTS (1945-1960)

"In 1943, they returned with their dredges, and they dug to Trắng Bridge; then after they made Trắng Bridge, they sent the dredge Nantes down to Xáng Bridge, and then dredged back here. This canal was finished in 1944. In 1945 the enemy soldiers returned, we rebelled, and the Revolution started. We then called this intersection "burned factory junction". The French had built a big factory there, 6 mills inside, very big. In 1945, we rebelled and destroyed the factory, even dug up the floor, and now we call it 'burned factory junction'."

-Ông Rỡ, Hoà Mỹ Commune, Phụng Hiệp[1]

During the First Indochina War (1946 - 1954) and the political transitions that followed, any sense of a singular state vision for water projects in the Mekong Delta was lost. Work on the *casiers* ceased as engineers found themselves caught in a series of government reorganizations beginning with the overthrow of the Vichy regime by the Japanese in March 1945. In June 1946, against the terms of earlier negotiations with Hồ Chí Minh, France supported the establishment of a separate Republic of Cochinchina. In 1949, as fighting worsened between Việt Minh troops and pro-French forces across Indochina, the French National Assembly established a State of Vietnam with Bao Đại as Chief of State and Cochinchina under the authority of a regional governor. Finally, in October 1955, a year before the Geneva Accords' scheduled election, Bao Đại's Prime Minister, Ngô Đình Diệm, organized a referendum that formally removed Bao Đại as Chief of State and established Diệm as President of the

[1] Interview 2, Ông Rỡ, 12 April 2002, [10-30]. "Vậy là 1943 nó trở lại máy đầm, nó múc vô tới Cầu Trắng rồi bắc cái càu xong nó kéo Xáng Năng [Nantes] vòng xuống Cầu Xáng, nó múc trở ra. Vậy kinh Xáng mới này hoàn thành năm 1944. 1945 có giặc, người ta Đông Khởi, Cách Mạng. Vậy gọi tắt ngã tư này, ngã tư này gọi tắt là ngã tư nhà máy cháy. Tức là Pháp cất nhà máy lớn, sáu cối, lớn lắm. Nhưng 1945 mình nổi dậy đập phá nhà máy, mình đào xới lấy cừ, bây giờ gọi tắt là nhà máy cháy."

Republic of Việt Nam. The biggest obstacle to new projects, however, was war. Nationalists opposed to the return of French in 1946 joined the Việt Minh's guerilla insurgency, a war waged in the Mekong Delta from remote bases in the swamps and flood plains. This anti-French coalition attracted support from local tenant farmers by promising to abolish high land rents, past debts, and the power of the old landlords. From the war, an alternative state vision of the rural landscape emerged. It was firmly rooted in the agricultural crisis of the 1930's and past failures of colonial administrators to respond to growing social and ecological crises.

One effect of the violent 8-year war was the polarization of the rural landscape into "liberated" and "controlled" areas. "Liberated" areas reflected Việt Minh policies of land redistribution following farmers' attacks on the old granaries and mills of former plantation owners. "Liberated" areas also took on unique ecological characteristics as a result of repeated campaigns in the area. To protect the interior, guerillas cut canals, destroyed bridges, and sabotaged roads to prevent penetration by enemy forces. Over time, marshes expanded and covered many of the old abandoned lands. Farmers also adapted to these changes by growing floating rice and harvesting wild, edible plants.

From their offices in Sài Gòn and the major towns, engineers shifted their attentions from *casiers* to more defensive measures aimed simply at maintaining the primary network of canals, roads, and ports as a "controlled" landscape. Maintaining existing

infrastructure became increasingly difficult with each new attack on the infrastructure. Local administrators sometimes reported rice convoys stranded in silted canals for days, making them vulnerable to Việt Minh raids. Many waterways and creeks had become part of a shifting battleground patrolled by pro-French forces on surplus WWII landing craft and armored barges. Finally, the growing presence of the Việt Minh's land reforms brought about new dialogues within the changing government offices.

This chapter traces the development of these dual state visions through the First Indochina War (1945-1954) and in the years following it. The six-year interval between the end of hostilities in 1954 and the organization of the National Liberation Front in 1960 offered an unusual period of experimentation in new projects. This experimentation was based both on a continuation of older state visions and a response to the challenges of the Việt Minh in the "liberated" areas. Equipped with American bulldozers, portable diesel engines and unprecedented military protection, Điệm's engineers attempted some of the largest water projects in this period before the escalation of hostilities again in 1960.

Constructing a "Liberated" Landscape

In 1953, a French report listed most of the western delta territories including Phụng Hiệp, Cà Mau, U Minh, Long Xuyên, and Đồng Tháp (Plain of Reeds) as "non-

controlled." Of the "controlled" territory that remained in this region, most was actually under the autonomous control of an allied group, the Hoa Hảo religious sect. The Việt Minh's widespread appeal in this region, called the "Transbassac" at the time, was due to their policy of immediate liquidation of the old colonial estates. One source notes that they redistributed 564,547 hectares of land to 527,163 families just in the first few years of the war.[2] The implications of this move for former tenant farmers was immense. One described the differences between the Việt Minh policies and the old terms on one of the largest colonial estates on the Xà No Canal:

> Before [1945], farmers rented land from the French landlord. If you rented a hundred congs (10 ha), then Gressier would lend you up to 100 or 200 *gịa* of rice. Everyone borrowed rice. We also bought fish sauce, kerosene, cloth and tools from the guy and paid him later. When the harvest came, we paid in rice. We also had to pay tax to him. So our life looked stable, but we couldn't save anything. We owed him so much, and we had to pay the debts and the tax at the same time. We just had some rice left after that.
>
> The Việt Minh redistributed the land to people on Gressier's plantation. Farmers then just needed to pay agricultural tax, which was not heavy. They did not have to pay anything else, so they could save more easily. Then people started farming 3 crops a year..[3]

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[2] Lầm Quang Huyền, *Cách Mạng Ruộng Đất ở Miền Nam Việt Nam* (Hanoi: [s.n.], 1985), 25. Cited in Pierre Brocheux, *The Mekong Delta*, 204.

[3] Interview 8, Ông Diệu, 19 April 2002, [510-564]. "Qua thời này, Việt Minh cấp dất cho nông dân trên đồn điền Gressier, người nông dân chỉ đóng khoản thuế nông nghiệp, tương đối nhẹ, ngòai ra không còn gì nữa hết, nên nông dân làm có dự. Với lại bây giờ áp dụng kỹ thuật nông nghiệp làm lúa tăng vụ, vùng đồn điền Gressier này làm 3 vụ không."

Even when pro-French forces regained control of some regions, farmers continued supporting the Việt Minh in hopes that they would maintain ownership in the new revolutionary land system.[4]

Two of the strongest core zones for the Việt Minh were the immense, flooded plains in Đồng Tháp (Mỹ Tho and Sa Đéc Provinces) and the inundated forests of U Minh in the Cà Mau Peninsula (Rạch Giá and Bạc Liêu Provinces). Persistent flooding in both of these regions and the dense foliage of reeds and mangroves respectively were strategically important for protecting guerilla bases; but the formation of these two "cradles of the revolution" had deeper roots in the agricultural crisis of the 1930's. Both areas had been scenes of some of the worst engineering failures and legal abuses. Indochinese Communist Party organizers had also focused their efforts in these areas since the early 1930's; and after the 1940 Nam Kỳ Uprising, they retreated to safe zones in these areas. With the formation of the Việt Minh in 1941, Party leaders then organized new guerilla bases and workshops.[5]

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[4] Ibid., [495-510].

[5] Both of these regions today include national parks set up after 1975 to preserve endangered ecosystems and historic sites here. Both areas were also occupied until recently by Khmer farmers; historians have yet to examine how revolutionary organizers related to these local Khmer residents. For a general description of both areas see Sơn Nam, *Văn Minh Miệt Vườn*. A local historian and Director of the Kiên Giang Province Office of Cultural Information, Bùi Văn Thạnh, has written a detailed history of the U Minh Thượng base that contains useful citations and local references. See Bùi Văn Thạnh, "Báo Cáo Khái Quát Lịch Sử và Phương Hướng Bảo Tồn, Phát Huy Di Tích Lịch Sử Căn Cứ Địa Cách Mạng U Minh Thượng Kiên Giang," *Kỷ Yếu Hội Thảo Khoa Học: Di Tích Lịch Sử Căn Cứ Địa Cách Mạng U Minh Thượng Tỉnh Kiến Giang* (Rạch Giá: Sở Văn Hoá Thông Tin-Thể Thao Kiên Giang, 1997), 45-82.

U Minh had once been part of one of the world's largest mangrove forests; canal projects in the early 1900's facilitated the rapid clearing and burning of this forest. By 1930, plantations covered most of the land east of Chắc Băng Canal. Ninh Thanh Lợi, scene of the 1927 massacre, was located in one section of this cleared area.

Repeated attempts by French planners to improve conditions in this region through irrigation projects were almost certainly linked to the ongoing political activities in the region by of one of the first ICP cells in the Mekong Delta. In 1931, two groups of Party members from Mỹ Tho and Vĩnh Long visited the village of Phước Long (Figure 4.1). In 1932, they established the Ranh Hạt Cell nearby at Vĩnh Thuận Village on the provincial border between Rạch Giá and Bạc Liêu on Chắc Băng Canal. Over the next several years, ICP members organized several protests with farmers at the Chắc Băng Market. Following the disastrous floods of 1938, they gathered more than 1000 persons in three separate protests, and coordinated raids on several granaries.[6] After news of these events reached Paris, an inspector visited in 1939, writing about the "malaise agraire" with criticisms of administrators in Bạc Liêu and Rạch Giá. He noted financial corruption in the region, problems with absenteeism, and "draconian conditions" for tenant laborers. In describing the ICP's activities at Phước Long and Vĩnh Thuận, he

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On Đồng Tháp see Võ Trần Nhã, ed, *Gởi Người Đang Sống: Lịch Sử Đồng Tháp Mười* (Hồ Chí Minh City: NXB TP Hồ Chí Minh, 1993).

[6] Bùi Văn Thạnh. "Báo Cáo Khái Quát Lịch Sử," 51-54.

noted that the location of the protests on provincial borders reflected the "political character" of the actions.[7]

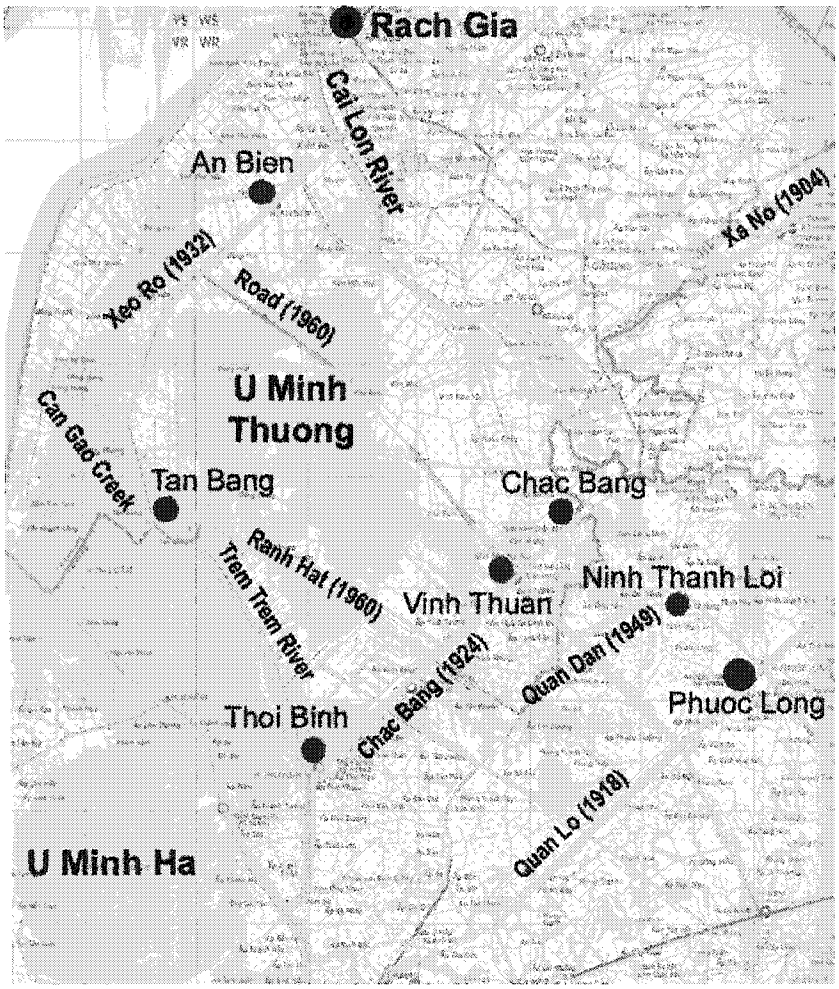


Figure 4.1: U Minh Thượng Area: The above map show major canals (yellow), villages (red), creeks and rivers (blue), and a road (purple) constructed in the U Minh Thượng *liberated zone* of the Việt Minh. The green shading denotes forested areas of mangrove (both freshwater and saltwater) forests. The underlying map was published in 1983 and thus shows considerably more cleared areas than existed in 1945. Quân Dân or "People's Army" Canal was dug in 1949 to facilitate transport of arms and machinery from the creeks in the U Minh Forests to the eastern canals and coastline. Enhanced text and graphics added by author. Map Source: NXB Bản Dồ. "Cà Mau 1/250.000." NC 48-10. Hà Nội: NXB Bản Đồ (1983).

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[7] M. Bagot, "Malaise Agraire dans le Transbassac," 28 April 1939, TTLTQG2, TDBCPNV M2/63, 6-8.

Later, in the repressive aftermath of the failed Nam Kỳ Uprising [Nov 23 1940], the region was also important as a safe zone.[8] Hundreds of ICP members from Mỹ Tho and other towns retreated to U Minh and Đồng Tháp. Trần Văn Giâu and other key Party members ordered cadres to begin building guerilla bases at both locations. When Hồ Chí Minh established the Việt Minh from his mountain headquarters on the China-Việt Nam border, Party members in the south expanded new cells at adjacent villages around U Minh at Vĩnh Thuận and An Biên. Võ Văn Kiệt, Phan Van Bảy and other Party leaders worked at Vĩnh Thuận while Trần Văn Giầu and others organized the cell at An Biên (Figure 4.1). These cells supported training camps, weapons workshops, and a printing press operating deep inside the forest. A workshop at Vĩnh Thuận produced 62 bombs and 24 rifles in 1941 alone.[9]

The U Minh region quickly became an important Việt Minh battle ground in 1946 when a force of 2000 marines with detachments of Vietnamese militia, Cao Đai, and Hoa Hảo entered Can Gáo Creek and overran the small Việt Minh bases. They constructed forts in their place at An Biên and Thới Bình. The Việt Minh militias, now pushed deep into the forest, built earthen dams along the forest's edge to prevent enemy access in the dry

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[8] The ICP attempted to spark a general uprising in the Mekong Delta after the fall of the French Third Republic in June to the Nazis. Party organizers took over government offices in Mỹ Tho for several days before French troops arrived by train from Sài Gòn and put down the rebellion.

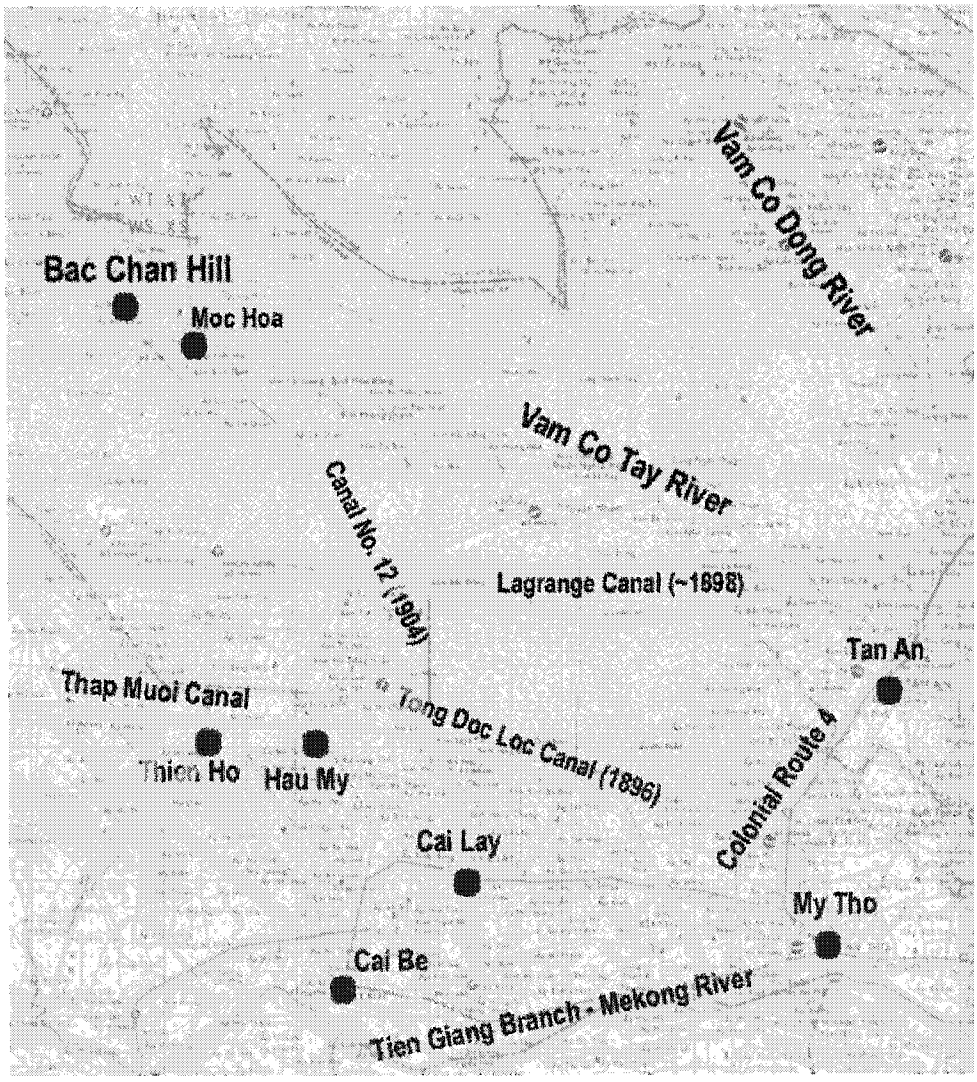
season. Despite being bombed repeatedly, the militias continued to rebuild these dams, and within two years they regularly attacked the French forts. By 1949, the Việt Minh had even initiated a new canal project, Quân Dân Canal, to facilitate easier movement of weapons and personnel east of U Minh to the coastal areas of the South China Sea. They quickly implemented land reforms and contained the area from the French military. By 1950, rice from Gressier and other plantations reached the U Minh bases. The Việt Minh by then controlled all territory south of the Cái Lớn River.[10] Until 1954, local Việt Minh committees established new tax rolls, redistributed old plantation land, and organized new schools.

While the Việt Minh succeeded in building a stable base at U Minh, generally the boundaries between *liberated* and *controlled* territory shifted frequently. For example, in 1952 during a period of severe flooding, many Việt Minh troops in Đồng Tháp survived by floating out on rafts and hiring themselves as agricultural laborers.[11] They recouped their losses in 1953, mounting a major resurgence that resulted in widespread control of the Đồng Tháp region several months before the French defeat at Điện Biện Phu. In these less protected terrains, the Việt Minh built mobile bases, some located just beyond the perimeters of enemy forts. For example, the 8th division headquarters of the Việt Minh army was located on Bắc Chan Hill just 4 kilometers upstream from French fortifications at the town of Mộc Hoá. The location was ideal because it lay

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[9] Bùi Văn Thạnh, 51.
[10] Ibid., 54.

above the floods, was covered in fruit orchards, and was situated along waterways leading south into the delta and north into Cambodia and Tây Ninh where the future COSVN headquarters would be located after 1952 and through much of the Second Indochinese War.[12]



[11] Elliott, 142.

Figure 4.2: Đồng Tháp Floodplain Area. The above map show major canals (yellow), villages and towns (red), creeks and rivers (blue), and one of the major colonial highways that linked the delta to Chợ Lớn and Sài Gòn (purple). One of the most important rear-bases was located at Bắc Chẩn Hill on the northern edge of the flood plain. The six-way intersection west of Thiên Hồ Village was an important local base of operations in the more densely populated fringes between the Tiền Giang Branch and the Đồng Tháp Plain. The blueish area in the center of this figure shows the extent of the eastern portion of the Đồng Tháp Plain. Vegetation here varied from fields of *sậy* reeds to island-like stands of freshwater mangrove to stands of trees and orchards on the few hills (*gò*) in the plain. Enhanced text and graphics added by author. Map Source: NXB Bản Dồ. "Thành Phố Hồ Chí Minh 1/250.000." NC 48-7. Hà Nội: NXB Bản Đồ (1983).

While ambushes of convoys and enemy troops proved that Việt Minh forces were capable of taking control of rural areas, it was the continuous destruction of roads, canals and bridges that was perhaps most effective at crippling French influence in the countryside. As the damage mounted, provincial administrators found it increasingly difficult to keep up the rate of repairs. Not long after a French military convoy was lost in an ambush on a highway at Tầm Vu, Việt Minh forces destroyed a section of highway on the same road at nearby Rạch Gòi Creek. Repairs cost 9000 piasters, and government workers filled the gap in the road with tree trunks as a stopgap measure while they waited for asphalt and road crews to arrive from Sài Gòn. By 1950, delays for such repairs and materials lasted months. Not long after the section was asphalted, another Việt Minh group attacked again, destroyed a 500-meter section of the road at a cost of 35,000 piasters.[13]

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[12] Hồ Sơn Đài, "Có Một Trung Tâm Kháng Chiến Ở Nam Bộ," *Gởi Người Đang Sống: Lịch Sử Đồng Tháp Mười*, Võ Trần Nhã, ed. (Hồ Chí Minh City: NXB Thành Phố Hồ Chí Minh, 1993), 61.
[13] Trần Van Đạt, "Réfection route endommagé près de Rachgoi par les V.M." 9 August 1950, TTLTQG2, TDBCPNV H.2/97.

Besides attacks on infrastructure and economic outposts, the Việt Minh also used floods and natural processes of sedimentation in the canals to their advantage. Where Public Works attempted to send dredges to clean the waterways, they harassed and sometimes attacked the crews. The old colonial dredging enterprise had completed their contract in 1939, and since then there had been no concerted effort to repair and clean the major canals. *Dos d'âne* blocked many of the major waterways by 1950. This natural barrier in transportation canals was very important to revolutionaries during the war, because it prevented the passage of armed river convoys, the deep-hulled ships of the French army. At the river port Bãi Xâu on Saintard Canal near Sóc Trang, one rice convoy in 1949 was stranded for three days on the *dos d'âne*; some boats from the military escort managed to pass and return to the base. Without a few hundred troops guarding the stranded boats day and night, the ships were open targets.[14]

Though deterioration of the canal infrastructure led to greater flooding and degradation of many agricultural areas, many area farmers continued to support the Việt Minh by shifting cultivation techniques and trading for supplies. Ông Rõ recalled adaptation to poor flooded condition in 1953 when the Việt Minh ousted a group of post-1945 landlords.

> In about 1953, the revolutionary government got together, and they granted land rights to the people as a preliminary step. They granted land from here to 1km from the bank of the river. With the extra land, they granted that to us too...Generally speaking the [post-1945] Vietnamese landlords were awful, they

[14] L'Administrateur, Chef de la Province de Soctrang à Monsieur l'Ingenieur Principal, Ched de l'Arrondissement de la Navigation, 29 July 1949, TTLTQG2, TDBCPNV, H.O/3.

> were traitors...the French left and they followed, so the Viet Minh claimed the right to manage and grant the land to the people. Because we wanted to keep the land, we then offered our children to the Revolution against the Americans and to our victory.
>
> ...So, in that time agriculture was not successful, because the elevation was only .2m above MSL, very low, so we could only use this land for growing tobacco, but for paddy we couldn't--we planted sugar too... we made raised beds, plenty of grass, it was this high [2-3 meters]...we had to cut the grass in order to make the raised beds to grow tobacco. just us farmers, just when we lived with the Viet Minh...we'd sell it then buy rice at Long Mỹ and bring it back here. Long Mỹ was higher, and you could have paddy...here, the elevation was too close to water level, you couldn't dry out the fields, you couldn't burn the straw because it was too wet...[15]

This organized Việt Minh response to rural poverty, especially in the former plantation lands of the Transbassac, also influenced government projects on land development. The plight of the tenant farmer (*tá điền*) had become a central facet of the land debate.

An edict dated May 21, 1947 was typical of government responses, proposing a system of regulated labor contracts that limited loans to 2/5th of the harvest. Because of fluctuations in rice prices, the decree set monetary values at the value of rice in Chợ Lớn for the prior harvest. It also called for the establishment of provincial committees to arbitrate over contract disputes. Each committee would consist of the provincial

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[15] Interview 2, Ông Rỡ, April 12, 2002. [030-085]. "Còn vấn đề quá trình khai thác và làm nông nghiệp của người dân, tức là năm 1953-54 ở đây được chính phủ cách mạng làm tập kết, cấp đất hết cho dân, tức là cơ nhứt. Từ dưới song lên một cây số cấp hết cho dân. Dầu dư bao nhiêu cũng cấp. ... Nói chung là địa chủ ác bá, tức là địa chủ phản động...Tây chay nó chay theo nên đất đó Việt Minh được quyền quản lý cấp lại cho dân. Nhờ sự cấp đất đó, vì gìn giữ đất đó, người ta mới hiến con em trong cuộc cách mạng chống Mỹ thắng lợi...Vậy, thời kỳ đó thất lắm, bởi vì cao trình là +0.2, thấp, nên hồi đó vùng này co thể phát lấy cỏ trồng thuốc [hút], chứ làm ruộng không được, và trồng mía nữa. Làm mô, cỏ dữ lắm, ngang đây nè...phát lấy cỏ làm mô lên trồng thuốc...Nông dân minh, hồi ở với Việt Minh. Ừ, bán rồi mua lúa ở

administrator, a provincial Councilor, two landowners, and two tenants. The decree banned other forms of advances and private lending terms, suggesting that they would be void in cases of dispute.[16] There is no documentary evidence suggesting that provincial administrators ever convened such councils.

Việt Minh land redistribution campaigns gradually pulled the French-backed government to a more extreme position. In a January 1953 radio broadcast, Hồ Chí Minh affirmed the official position of the Việt Minh to recognize land redistributions authorized in the past. Upon receiving a transcript of the broadcast, a newly appointed regional governor, Nguyễn Văn Tam, responded with his own plans for a more "concrete and productive" program on land reform. He urged redistribution of large estates through 3-year land sales financed by a new *Service National du Crédit Agricole et Artisanal Coopératif*. He intended for the bank to rapidly redistribute land in limited-size parcels in a manner that appealed to peasants without being confused with "Marxist programs" of land redistribution.[17]

The proposal, however, still failed to address the long-standing problem that the majority of farmers, especially those living on old plantations, were so poor they could never afford such a scheme. In one instance farmers wrote an open letter to the

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Long Mỹ về đây ăn. Vùng Long Mỹ cao trình cao, nó làm ruộng được...mình cao trình trầm thủy, không chắt ra khô đồng, không đốt được đất thấp. Khi tập kết xong dân tự đào mương chắt nước."

[16] "Arrete du 21 Mai 1947 relatif à la question entre les Ta-dien et les propriétaires de rizières," TTLTQG2, TDBCPNV M2/63.

governor, urging him to immediately seize abandoned estates and redistribute them. Doing this, they argued, would reverse the Việt Minh's power base and resuscitate the failing rural economy.[18] In further correspondence with his ministers, the governor rejected the idea on the grounds that it would reaffirm "Marxist methods [of confiscation] in a totalitarian Government."[19]

Inactivity on the part of the government was further complicated by the presence of American aid after 1950. Since the signing of a "mutual defense assistance" agreement with France and the Associated States on June 23, 1950, the United States established a US Operations Mission (USOM) with offices in Hà Nội and Sài Gòn. By 1953, USOM provided an estimated 80% (about $3 billion USD/year) of military expenses to the French and Bao Dai's State of Việt Nam.[20] While there is little evidence of US delegates involvement in the Mekong Delta before 1954, USOM funded several major projects in the north. The Đồng Quân "new life" (đời mới) hamlet was located some 8 kilometers south of Hà Nội on the Nam Định highway. In a matter of months in early

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[17] Nguyễn Văn Tam, No. 52-SG/Cir, TTLTQG2, PTTDNCH 9492.
[18] Tu Vân Quí, Director-General of SNCAAC to the President of the State of Viet-Nam, 19 March 1953, TTLTQG2, PTTDNCH 9492, 1-2. "Le Gouvernement National, sous l'égide de votre Excellence, a tenu sa promesse en réalisant, avec clairvoyance, la réforme agraire dans le respect des coutumes et de la possibilité du Pays. Il a apporté à ce problème une solution conciliante permettant de servir à la fois les intérêts des paysans qui ont fait de gros efforts et ceux du Pays. C'est pourquoi le Gouvernement n'approuve pas la confiscation des terres, car ce serait ainsi nier le driot de propriété dont le principe est admis par les Pays civilisés. Il aurait ainsi adopté la méthode marxiste qui a conduit les paysans à l'asservissement au profit d'un Gouvernement totalitaire."
[19] Ibid.
[20] "Mutual Defense Assistance: Indochina-Agreement Between the United States of America and Cambodia, France, Laos and Viet-nam," *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 48, No. 3, Supplement: Official Documents (July 1954), 133-137.

1953, work crews with newly contributed American bulldozers and heavy equipment razed the existing village center and constructed a new grid of paved streets and concrete buildings with a new modern market along the banks of a canal. Đồng Quân even included an airstrip and paved roads inside the perimeter. USOM's delegates even planned for a visit to the site by Governor Tam with an American dignitary, Governor Adlai Stevenson.[21]

While the project appeared to be successful on the surface, a Vietnamese engineer visiting the project wrote in his memoirs that the shiny new buildings and well-supplied market disguised what was still a very dire situation for farmers in the regions outside the town. The project had not won the support of landless people because it did nothing to redistribute property. Second, the Việt Minh moved freely through the town and did not attack because they needed the market as a source for black market goods and a place to find reliable guides to the city. Finally, government officials refused to attack the town because they feared losing American support.[22]

Even with infusions of American military, material and financial aid, government officials were powerless to regain control of the more rural regions if they could not address the fundamental terms of land reform. By 1953, the loss of territory to the Việt Minh was even recognized in published monographs. In Rạch Giá Province alone , the

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[21] "February 1953: War Relief and Rehabilitation," NARAII, RG 469, E.1447, Box 13.

Việt Minh controlled 478,000 hectares of rice land—roughly 20% of all arable farmland in the delta. Together with gains in Cần Thơ and Bạc Liêu Provinces, they had seized a "rice basket" for the revolution. The Việt Minh held the greatest influence with the poorest classes of farmers, especially in the more sparsely populated provinces of the Transbassac and Đồng Tháp (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Comparison of "Controlled" and "Liberated" Territory, 1953

Eastern Provinces	Controlled Pop/Area (Ha)	Liberated Pop/Area (Ha)
Mỹ Tho[23]	300,000/80,000	60,000/43,660
Gò Công[24]	119,800/40,000	200/10,347
Trà Vinh[25]	210,000/200,000	nd/10,000
Tân An[26]	100,000/47,000	50,000/319,000
Western Provinces	**Controlled Pop/Area (Ha)**	**Liberated Pop/Area (Ha)**
Sa Đéc[27]	151,500/52,650	80,400/102,750
Cần Thơ[28]	179,400/86,890	220,600/132,119
Long Xuyên[29]	nd/274,428	nd/0
Châu Đốc[30]	182,000/127,002	90,000/98,796
Rạch Giá[31]	76,000/50,000	194,605/656,205

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[22] Nguyen Cong Vien, *Seeking the Truth: The Inside Story of Viet Nam After the French Defeat by a Man Who Served in Bao Dai's Cabinet* (New York: Vantage Press, 1966), 25-29.
[23] TTLTQG2, TDBCPNV, E.02/112 (1953).
[24] TTLTQG2, TDBCPNV, E.02/109 (1953).
[25] TTLTQG2, TDBCPNV, E.02/118 (1953).
[26] TTLTQG2, TDBCPNV, E.02/116 (1953). Tân An Province at this time included the eastern half of the Plain of Reeds (Đồng Tháp) with most of the population living around the provincial seat, Tân An.
[27] TTLTQG2, TDBCPNV, E.02/115 (1953). Sa Đéc Province at this time comprised the present-day area around Sa Đéc and the central portion of the Plain of Reeds (present-day Đồng Tháp Province).
[28] TTLTQG2, TDBCPNV, E.02/104 (1953).
[29] TTLTQG2, TDBCPNV, E.02/111 (1953). The Long Xuyên figures do not describe population or non-controlled area citing the mobility of the population, but instead attribute land in total area controlled as: Hoa Hảo/ 200,000(ha), Cao Đài/30,000, Catholic/15,000, Buddhist/30,000.
[30] TTLTQG2, TDBCPNV, E.02/106 (1953). In Châu Đốc Province, the Việt Minh area was 14,000 people and roughly 98,000 hectares while the Hoa Hảo here controlled 102,000 hectares with a population of 92,000 people. The French controlled the urban area around Châu Đốc with an area of 17,515 Ha and a population of 76,000 people.

Cold War Experiments in Reclamation and Resettlement

The Geneva Accords in July and the series of events that followed in 1954-55 ultimately permitted an autocratic regime in Sài Gòn to initiate some of the largest resettlement and reclamation schemes ever attempted. Under pressure from China and the Soviet Union, Democratic Republic of Việt Nam (DRVN) negotiators accepted the stipulation that all Việt Minh combatants would regroup north of the 17th parallel. They relinquished control over the vast areas in Rạch Giá and Cần Thơ controlled for most of the war. By agreeing to hold elections in 1956, the DRVN also allowed Bao Đại's newly appointed Prime Minister, Ngô Đình Diệm, and his American backers to consolidate power in the south. Two months before the Geneva Accords had started, a covert U.S. operative had commenced plans to build a strong allied state in the former Cochinchina. Edward G. Lansdale, a CIA operative who had helped Magsaysay in the Philippines, arrived in Sài Gòn on June 1 to build a similar program of support for Diệm. His Saigon Military Mission (SMM) suggested formation of a Commission of Refugees in August and sent a counter-insurgency commando, Major Lucien Conein, to run it. C-46 transport planes carried an estimated 900,000 refugees—mostly Catholic—

[31] TTLTQG2, TDBCPNV, E.02/113 (1953).

from Nam Định and Thái Bình in the north to temporary camps around Sài Gòn and in the Mekong Delta.[32]

After defeating rival religious sects and political enemies in the summer of 1954 in Sài Gòn, Diệm moved quickly to consolidate power in the countryside. He announced Ordinance 2 and Ordinance 7 in early 1955, affirming landlords' rights to reclaim all lands formerly seized by the Việt Minh. The grand proprietors (đại điền chủ) returned with military escorts and the legal protection of new village councils. Upon returning to the old estates, many seized crops not yet harvested, causing widespread confusion and violence with former tenants. In Bạc Liêu, tenants opposed paying the new contract taxes of 15-25%, saying that it would reduce them to starving. On some plantations, owners even tried to extract back taxes.[33] In the former Việt Minh strongholds, some landlords worked with police to prevent tenants from farming altogether, or until they paid land rent in advance. Police also detained Party officials and "tenant representatives" of the Agricultural Workers Union under hazy new powers of authority.[34]

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[32] Carlyle A. Thayer, *War by Other Means: National Liberation and Revolution in Viet-Nam 1954-1960* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989), 18. See also "Lansdale Team's Report on Covert Saigon Mission in '54 and '55" in Neil Sheehan et al, *The Pentagon Papers, as Published by the New York Times* (New York: Bantam, 1971), 55.
[33] Liên Đoàn Nông-Dân Lao-Động VN, "Báo Cáo: Tình Hình Chung Nông Dân Các Tỉnh Tronh Tháng 5 và Tháng 6 1955," TTLTQG2, PTTDNCH 9492, 1-2.
[34] Ibid., 3.

With close support from US military and civilian advisors in early 1955, Diệm launched military and political offensives to destroy any remaining bases and Việt Minh political organizations. He launched an Anti-Communist Denunciation Campaign to undermine rural centers of Việt Minh strength. The term "Việt Công" was first used during this campaign as a slur against Vietnamese Communists. In combined police and military actions, 40,768 people were arrested, 1,563 were killed, 4,636 were wounded, and 732 were declared missing.[35]

This swift transition of events from a nadir of government inaction in the countryside in 1954 to a broad police presence in 1955 and Diệm's staged referendum that creating his presidency produced a momentary illusion of stability and leadership in the countryside. Those Việt Minh and sect leaders who had not moved north were either in prison, in hiding or dead. American advisors and RVN engineers went to work immediately, recognizing that there was only a very short time to "fix" the social and environmental problems in the delta before they would nurture a return to insurgency. From 1955 to 1960, the United States sent 1.4 billion dollars in grants and loans and 444 million dollars in military aid; the RVN became the third-largest recipient for US aid after Taiwan and South Korea.[36] This influx of cash, foreign advisors and machinery enabled unprecedented deployments of equipment into rebel territory. The budget for

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[35] Vietnam News Agency, May 4, 1956 cf Thayer, *War by Other Means*, 117.
[36] John D. Montgomery, *The Politics of Foreign Aid: American Experience in Southeast Asia* (New York: Praeger, 1962), 284.

the struggling RVN Public Works Ministry increased 40-fold from 20 million piasters in 1954 to 800 million in 1957.[37]

Despite the recent operations and new government programs in former "liberated" zones, most tenants refused to participate. For almost a decade in some areas, they had payed little or no rent, and they saw no reason to return to rates as high as 25%. Similarly, the former landlords refused to cede to the government control of tenant relations that had until 1945 been a completely private matter. Local standoffs between landlords and tenants continued through the summer of 1955, causing American advisors to worry that the situation might soon degenerate into violent resistance. Landlords and tenants were essentially divided over the proposed rate, with tenants refusing to pay more than 15% and landlords refusing to offer lower than 25%. [38]

Wolf Ladejinsky, USOM's agriculture specialist in Sài Gòn, visited key towns in the Mekong Delta in July to see the situation first-hand. In a series of meetings convened with officials, landlords, and tenants, he was repeatedly surprised by how tenants spoke in frank terms, without hesitation or deference to the landlords. During years of Việt Minh occupation, tenants had suffered shortages in seed, fertilizer and livestock but they enjoyed ownership and low taxes before the return of the landlords. Tenants asked

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[37] Tổng Giám Đốc Công Chánh Việt Nam k/g Ông Bộ Trưởng Công Chánh và Giáo Thông, 15 April 1957, TTLTQG2, GTCC 1276/1.
[38] Wolf Ladejinsky, July 16, 1955. "South Vietnam Revisited," USOM Vietnam Classified Subject Files, NARA II, RG 469 250/82/33/03/01, 48.

for credit, land to purchase, and buffaloes to work it. Ladejinsky observed repeatedly that tenants and landowners spoke of the inevitability of massive land sales and the dissolution of the old estates. They differed mainly on the terms.[39] In one case, the chief of a province got "carried away" in a tenant meeting, saying that one of the ultimate goals of the National Government was land redistribution. He then tried to recover, chiding the tenants: "Don't you go home beating your breasts and telling the other tenants that the land is theirs."[40] Almost all tenants interviewed expected that they would eventually need to purchase land to own it. Prices of 50-60 piasters per hectare for good farmland were considered good at the time, and most farmers were willing to purchase if they could secure good credit.

Ladejinsky echoed a common American concern at the time, that the success or failure of their state-building effort would not depend on events in Sài Gòn government offices so much as in the fields and villages of the southern countryside. Americans such as Ledjinsky and other advisors at USOM had reservations about the commitment of local administrators to engage in meaningful economic and policy reforms, but they acknowledged that the threat of political instability justified extreme actions. Despite his concerns over Diệm's commitment to land reform, Ladejinsky advised USOM to initiate a new American-funded loan program worth 30 million USD as well as massive

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[39] Ladejinsky, 51.
[40] Ibid.

commitments in material aid including importation of 8,000 to 10,000 buffaloes from Thailand to replace those lost during the war.[41]

American willingness to countenance this new rural development effort led Diệm to establish a Land Reclamation General Commission (Tổng-Ủy Dinh Điền) on April 23, 1957 to carry out a series of four major reclamation and settlement projects. He named Vice President Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ as the Director and identified three Agricultural Development Centers [Công Trường Khuếch Trương Nông Nghiệp] at U Minh, Đồng Tháp and Cái Sắn.[42] The program also included an agricultural mechanization campaign [Quốc-Gia Nông-Cụ Cơ-Giới-Cuộc] supported by the arrival of several thousand tractors and tillers from the U.S. Diệm used the report to outline his own nationalist sentiments, describing the projects as a means of increasing trade and technological development that had been "retarded and dominated by foreigners." [43] Over the next three years, the RVN's Public Works engineers dredged canals, built roads and expanded each of the Agricultural Development Centers.

As the first major implementations of the state since 1945, these three projects were new in terms of the abundant money and equipment; but they were also inescapably lodged in a deep local history of engineering practices. They borrowed their core logic

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[41] Ibid., 58.
[42] Bùi Văn Lương, "Báo Cáo về Hoạt Động Của Phủ Tổng Ủy Dinh Điền Nhân Dịp Kỷ Niêm Đệ-Tam Chu-Niên Chấp-Chánh của Ngô Tổng Thống Ngay 7.7.1957," TTLTQG2, PTTDNCH: Đệ 1, 10807.
[43] Ibid.

from pre-1945 *casier* designs. And the decision to center the projects directly on top of old Việt Minh bases suggested the preference of achieving more political than technical aims by physically clearing away the old rebel landscape.

The most visible presence in post-1954 water projects was the corps of former colonial engineers and entrepreneurs who stayed on in Sài Gòn working as private contractors for the RVN or USOM. Working with Vietnamese engineers in the Ministry of Transport and Public Works, they helped preserve an archive of past projects attempted before 1945. The new Vietnamese ministry did not even change its physical location from the colonial Public Works office. Furniture, books, and files remained; only the occupants of the offices changed. Most Vietnamese engineers working in the Ministry were also the products of French schools. Jammé, HANSI's Chief Engineer in 1945, was perhaps the single most influential engineer with regards to the new projects. Before the war began, he had authored several advance project reports including proposals for reclamation at U Minh and Đồng Tháp. After 1954, he joined a new French consulting firm, *Société Grenobloise d'Etudes et d'Applications Hydrauliques* (SOGREAH), and worked with France's Mission de Coopération Technique et Économique en Indochine.[44]

[44] Trần Lê Quang, Bộ Trưởng Công Chánh và Giáo Thông. "V/v xin nhuộng phi-ảnh vùng Mỹ-Phước Tinh Ba-Xuyên". TTLTQG2, GTCC 1576.

Colonial enterprises also played an important though problematic role in construction work before 1960. One of the first American aid contracts in 1955-56 paid the old dredging enterprise, *Société Française d'Enterprise de Dragages et de Travaux Publics* (SFEDTP), to organize and train operators for a new Vietnamese fleet of dredges. The fleet included some refurbished French machines and two new American ones—8" cutter-suction dredges manufactured by the Johnson Corporation.[45] SFEDTP continued to operate as a private company on various contracts with USOM and the RVN until its dissolution in 1960. The competition between the private enterprise and the new state enterprise created logistical and personnel conflicts—SFEDTP charged triple the Government's rate of 10.79 piasters/m^3 for its services, and its total operating capacity in 1957 was almost triple that of the government.[46]

While the new projects did not ultimately prevent the spread of political instability in the countryside, the causes of each project's failure were complex and should not be generalized to a general failure of the Vietnamese state. They failed for unique local factors of the social and hydraulic landscape as much as they failed in their inception. The remainder of this chapter follows the rise and fall of each of these state-building projects. It locates each in a deeper historical context of *casier* thinking and past engineering knowledge of the areas. Each project was a new kind of boundary zone

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[45] Daniel, Mann, Johnson & Mendenhall [DMJM], "Preliminary Economic and Engineering Study: Dredging Program," Contract No. AID-430-990, TTLTQG2, NL504.
[46] Nguyễn Văn Đình, "V/v đề-nghị mua 2 chiếc xáng Ellicott 12-inch loại Dragon," 1962, TTLTQG2, GTCC 288/4.

situated at the frontier between government control and the deeper interior of the countryside. The projects involved a conceptual melding of older French colonial ideas about *casier* and newer American ideas centered on intense mechanization and forms of land ownership influenced by recent experiences with the New Deal. These conceptual projects also blended in them Diệm's ideas drawn from more classical, pre-colonial ideas of military-agricultural settlements (*đồn điền*). The language in a 1957 report clearly describes a policy for moving soldiers into the Development Centers:

> Parallel with the establishment of the General Commission, the Agricultural Development Centers and the President has ordered Army of the Republic of Vietnam [ARVN] and the Security Section to maneuver troops who are close to the end of their service to the Settlement Centers...to create Agricultural Centers and find land that is agreeable, to organize their own defense, to clear the land by means they already possess, and to erect houses so that gradually their families may come to live...[47]

Đồng Tháp, where the first project was located, had been a source of social and environmental problems since the French conquest in 1862. The swampy terrain covered 697,000 ha in Vietnam and 253,000 in Cambodia, creating a permeable border traversed by small boats. The central part (Figure 4.3) was a marshy depression flooded every rainy season for several months into November. Most permanent settlements were along the southern boundaries or on island-like *gò*, sandy hills formed by on top of

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[47] Ibid. "Song song với việc thành lập Nha Tổng Quản Đốc, các Công Trường Khuếch-Trương Nông Nghiệp, Tổng Thống cũng đã chỉ-thị cho Quân-Đội Việt-Nam Cộng-Hoà cùng Bảo-An-Đoàn điều-động một số binh-sỹ sắp đến hạn giải-ngũ, đến những Trung-Tâm Dự-Định lập Nông-Trường để tìm địa-điểm thích hợp, tự tổ chức phòng vệ, khai-phá bằng phương-tiện riêng hiện có, cất nhà để đưa lần lần gia-đình họ đến lập nghiệp."

ancient sand dunes.[48] It was also a site for organized political opposition since the first days of the conflict.[49] Memory of the colonial battles in Đồng Tháp continued well after the loss of the province in 1867, and most villages in the region traced their origins to either Dương or the collaborators led by "Governor" Lộc.

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[48] Gò Tháp (Tower Hill) was the site of a Vietnamese fort built under King Thiêu Trị (1840-1847) located north of the present-day town of Tháp Mười (Mỹ An) along 4 Bis Canal. One legend for the origin of the name Tháp Mười (10 Tower) is that a ten-story tower was built here as a watchtower. Other sources suggest the tower was originally a Cambodian structure from an earlier period before re-modification by the Vietnamese. Société des Études Indo-Chinoises, *Monographie de la Province de Sa-Déc* (Saigon: Imprimerie L. Ménard, 1903), 26.

[49] Nguyễn Hiền Lê. *Bảy Ngày Trong Đồng Tháp Mười*, 43-51. In April 1866, Võ Duy Dương led over 1000 soldiers against 4500 colonial troops. After heavy casualties on both sides, the French took the fort. An ally of the French, Trần Ba Lộc, was key to their victory. Lộc's militia chased down and eventually captured Dương and his commanders. In return for this service, the colonial government awarded him the title of "Tổng Đốc" in Đồng Tháp and awarded him land concessions there. Few accounts of the battle exist in Vietnamese sources, although the Ministry of Culture and Information has recently begun to develop these sites in Đồng Tháp as national historic sites with assistance from UNICEF. One recent article in the newspaper *Nhân Dân* describes in detail the landscape and various sites associated with Gò Tháp. "Landscapes: Go Thap," *Nhân Dân* [English Version], October 16, 1999.

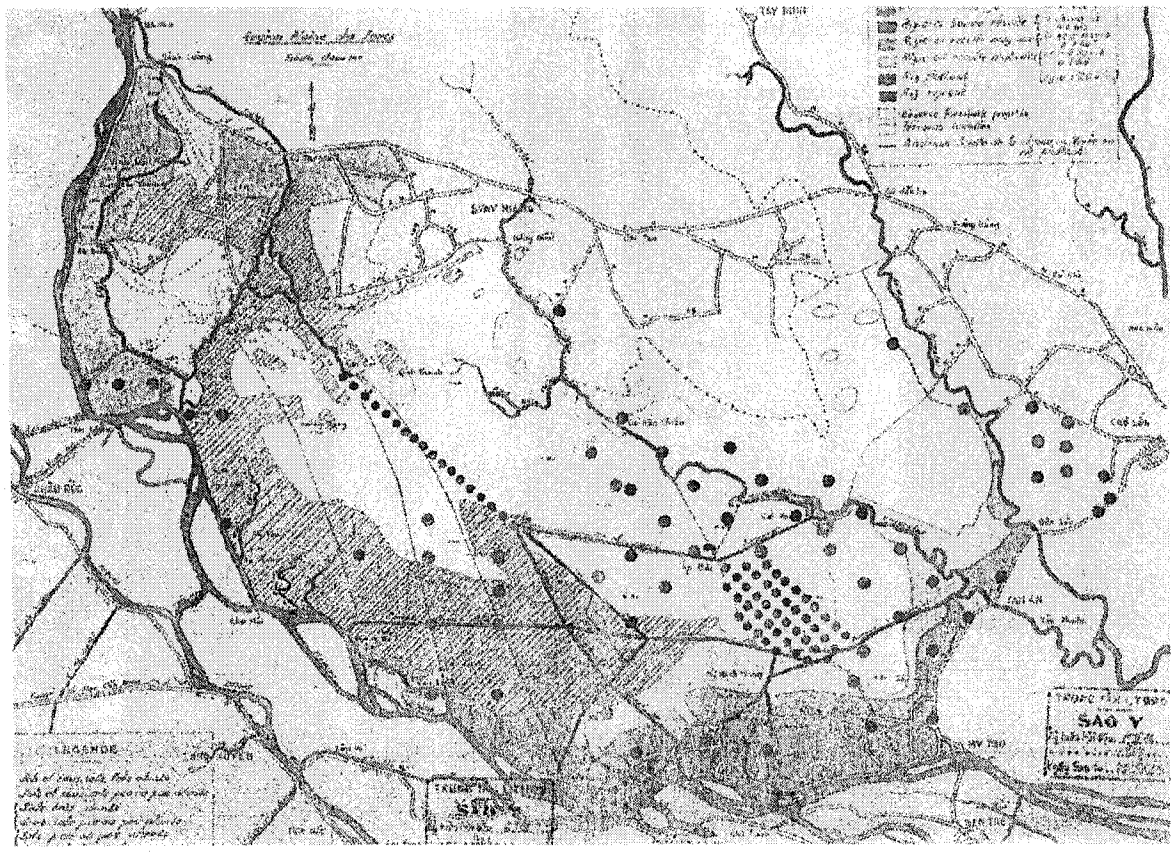


Figure 4.3: Plain of Reeds: The image above shows major canals and different areas of cultivation circa 1943 with the dots representing soil surveys conducted after 1955. Gò Bắc Chiên, the center for the Việt Minh 8th Division is noted in the center of the Plain. The large block of soil samples in the southeast area corresponds to the limits of a planned *casier* that became a relocation center for northern refugees. The line of dots in the northwest corresponds to the path for what in 1958 became the Công Hoa [Republic] Canal. Source: "Amenagement de la Plaine des Joncs: Carte des Cultures. Annexe No. II jointe au rapport de l'Ingenieur des P.C. Jammé en date du 20-7-1943." TTLTQG2: GTCC Folio 312.

Đồng Tháp also had a long history of engineering failures. Projects here consumed the largest share of early colonial budgets before 1904. The colonial Department of Public Works completed Lagrange Canal, Tháp Mười Canal, Canals 1-10 and Canals 25-29 during successive campaigns from 1894 to 1904. Disastrous floods then almost completely destroyed the new plantations from 1904-1908. Engineers then moved the

dredges to Phụng Hiệp and Cần Thơ.[50] They did not return to the region with major plans until 1934. Given the weak economy in the 1930's and political upheavals in 1940 and 1945, engineers only completed desk studies and debated the future of the region inside their offices in Sài Gòn. They formed two camps on Đồng Tháp. Benabencq (1916) and Svigliani (1942) suggested a plan that "allowed the flood to pass" through a larger network of drainage canals that redirected floodwater from the Mekong and Vàm Cỏ Rivers to the sea. Engineers Nguyễn Ngọc Bích (1938), Lefebvre (1942), and Jammé (1943) favored an alternate plan based on a system of protective dikes around giant *casiers* that would more closely resemble forms of flood protection in the Red River Delta.

For the new Agricultural Development Center, RVN engineers and foreign consultants decided upon a mixed solution involving dikes around selected *casiers* and several new canals to drain the floods.[51] They identified the first major resettlement *casier* between Lagrange and Tổng Độc Lộc Canals (Figure 4.3). The choice of this location for the first stage suggested the primary importance in the project of achieving strategic advantage in the region. The casier enclosed the *rừng chàm* or "indigo forest" at Hưng Thạnh Mỹ; this forest of indigo trees surrounded 5 square kilometers of rice fields and

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[50] M. Machefaux and M. Walthert, "Rapport de Mission d'Etudes d'Amenagement Hydro-Agricole au Viet-nam," TTLTQG2, GTCC 312, 9. See also Cơ Quan Khai Thác Xáng – Ty Nghiên Cứu và Chương Trình, "Chương Trình Khai Thác Đông Tháp," 1972, TTLTQG2, GTCC C1276/2. In this Vietnamese version of the 1972 Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) study, the Vietnamese date the network of Canals 1-10 and Tổng Độc Lộc to 1839. It is very likely that parts of this network dated to

had been a Việt Minh forward base and administrative retreat on the edge of Đồng Tháp. The good terrain and productive fields attracted Party committees from surrounding villages to relocate here during the worst of French military campaigns from 1951-53. By 1953, the site was famous as a local "killing field" where many Việt Minh and French had died.[52] By locating a *casier* here, engineers intended to physically clear the landscape of any trace of resistance.

The projects were important to the government's efforts to connect physical projects to its own "benevolent" state vision: RVN structures were "stabilizing" or "harmonizing" while the Việt Minh had only followed a "scorched earth" policy. Related to this was the need to control the flow of water, especially floods, by channeling and stabilizing its movement towards the Mekong River and the sea.[53] By constructing new dikes, pumping stations, and canals, government engineers literally and figuratively intended a "concretization" of the local landscape and rural people.[54] This rhetorical contrast of 'concretization" and "scorched earth" was not unique to Việt Nam at the time but part

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18th century Khmer settlements and early 19th century Vietnamese establishments before being re-dredged in the 1890's.

[51] Machefaux and Walthert, 11-12.

[52] David Elliott, *The Vietnam War*, 142-43.

[53] Minister of Agriculture to Presidential Cabinet Director, August 20 1957, TTLTQG2, GTCC 312. "Tài Đồng tháp mười, Bộ Công Chánh chủ-trương đắp một số đê dài, rộng lớn, vững chắc, và thiết-lập một hệ-thống nông giang dẫn thủy và thoát-thủy, đủ sức giữ và điều hòa mực nước cho triền sông Mékong và nhất là triền 2 sông Vàm-Cỏ."

[54] République du Viêt-Nam, *Les Travaux d'Hydraulique Agricole au Viet-Nam* (Saigon: [s.n.], 1960), 7. "Après 10 années de guerre, au cours de laquelle les communistes ont appliqué la méthode dite <<de la terre brûlée>>, presque tous les ouvrages d'aménagements hydrauliques agricoles ont été systématiquement détruits, livrant ainsi nos rizières à la merci des intempéries et de l'action néfaste de l'eau salée."

of a broader, Cold War discourse on land development especially in Asia. The United States and its allies used similar language in such programs as Truman's Point IV and Britain's Colombo Plan; dressing up projects in such language was important for combating the appeal of Soviet and Chinese land reforms. The clearing of land with dredges and bulldozers, causing new dislocations of tenants at the same time that others were being resettled, was anything but "harmonizing".

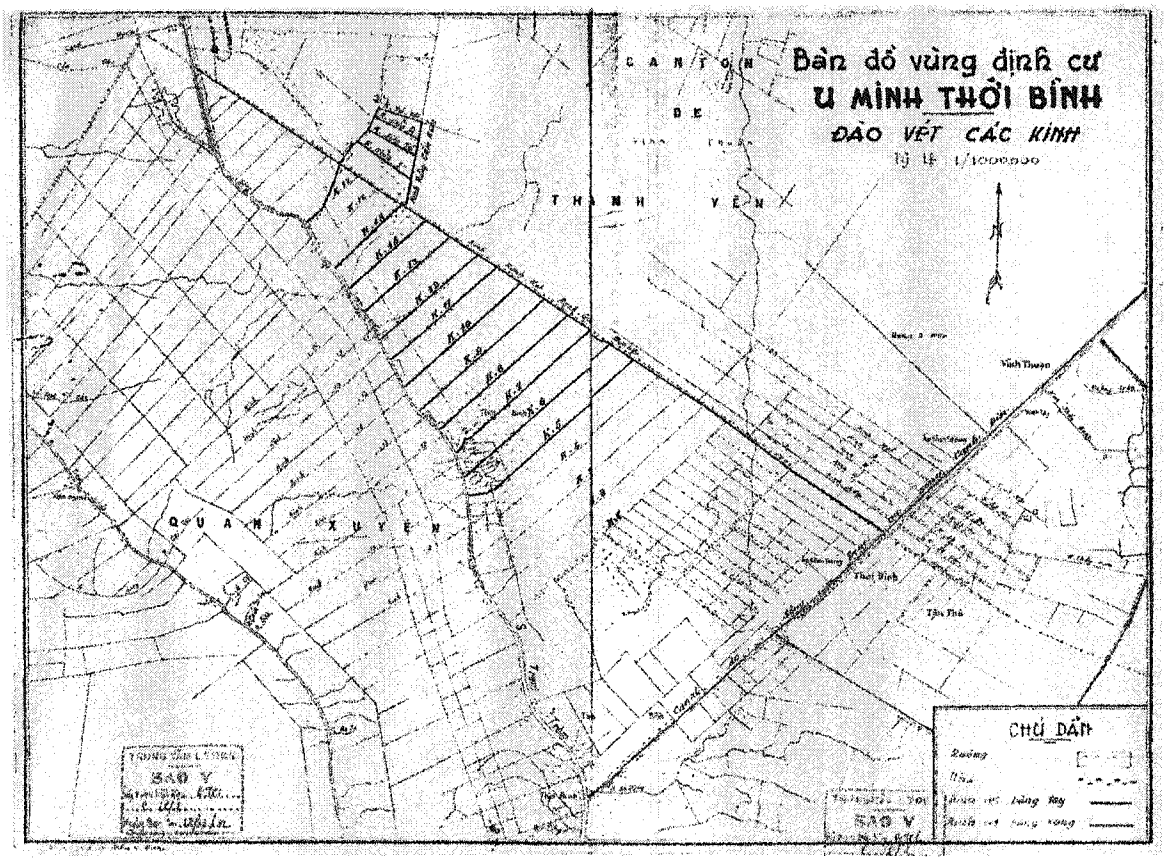


Figure 4.4: U Minh Settlements: The above plan shows several sections for resettlement casiers in the U Minh region with a major east-west canal, Ranh Hạt Canal, bisecting a portion of the forested area of U Minh Thượng. It formed both drainage canal and dike on the southern border of the forest. The new grids of canals and settlements also covered the important intersection of creeks at Thới Bình. Source:

Khu Thủy Nông. "Đào Vét Các Kinh Nhỏ và Kinh Ranh Hạt Thuộc Vùng U Minh Thới Bình." (1957) TTLTQG2: GTCC Folio C18/1.

At U Minh, both Diệm and the Americans realized the strategic importance of "winning the peace" in this former stronghold of the Việt Minh's 9th Division. Development and irrigation needed to be "immediately viable and also future-oriented."[55] Diệm put his personal touch on the program by designating that only veteran "soldier-farmers" would be allowed to participate in the reclamation program. Like Đồng Tháp, the theoretical approach to dredging at U Minh drew heavily from earlier desk studies completed by French engineers before 1945. Jammé and his colleagues had identified the region as problematic because of political instability and environmental challenges caused by the deposits of peat soil here.

After just a few months of work with the American dredges and bulldozers, the Reclamation Office began moving settlers to parcels along the new canals. They were described as veterans and also as "returnees" from Cambodia. 660 families (2,696 persons) moved to plots along the northern bank of Ranh Hạt Canal in the first wave of the project. With a planned grid of 17 branching canals from Ranh Hạt, the *casier*

[55] Bùi Văn Lương, General Commissioner of Land Reform. Letter to Minister of Public Works, Saigon, 18th November 1957, TTLTQG2, GTCC C18/1.

would eventually permit an additional 3,000 families (15,000 persons) over the following three years to establish households in areas adjacent to Ranh Hạt.[56]

Almost immediately after dredges had completed the canals, environmental problems surfaced. Jammé visited the area in October 1957 with the Director of RVN Public Works' Irrigation Office to inspect conditions. He described villagers digging branching canals by hand and using the new Thai buffalos to stir up remaining layers of peat from the banks and wash it into the river. Because the northern bank of the canal bordered forest, farmers preferred living here because of the easier access to wood, fish and game. Instead of living within the bulldozed square plots between the canals, they chose to cut into the forest. Witnessing this "decimation" of the peat soils in the forest—Jammé and his colleagues advised immediate relocation of these families. Besides these illegal land clearing activities, the American dredges ultimately had to stop work here because of the dense network of roots and trees encountered during excavations. American advisors pressed Public Works to move the dredges to abandon U Minh and work instead at the third site, Cái Sắn.[57] Local requests for heavy equipment were also held up by red tape and competing demands.[58]

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[56] Bùi Văn Lương. "Báo Cáo về Hoạt Động Của Phủ Tổng Ủy Dinh Điền Nhân Dịp Kỷ Niêm Đệ-Tam Chu-Niên Chấp-Chánh của Ngô Tổng Thống Ngay 7.7.1957." TTLTQG2. Phủ Tổng Thống: Đệ 1, 10807.

[57] "Tờ Trình Của Trưởng Khu Thủy-Nông,"November 19, 1957, TTLTQG2, GTCC C18/1.

[58] "Bộ Trưởng Bộ Công Chánh và Giáo Thông Kính Gửi Ông Tỉnh Trưởng Kiên-Giang," November 29, 1958, TTLTQG2, GTCC C18/1.

By late 1958, the Chief Engineer declared that the U Minh region was completely unsafe for dredging. Guerillas had successfully ambushed the dredger "Cần Thơ" on the Sông Trẹm Canal, killing the dredger captain and critically wounding the Chief Surveyor. At Canal Number 5 on Ranh Hạt, a battle erupted between the Army of the Republic of Việt Nam (ARVN) and local guerillas. The Chief Engineer wrote to the Minister of Public Works that the situation in U Minh was impossible to continue and that he "would not send his staff off to die."[59] While foreign advisors and Sài Gòn engineers pushed to abandon the project at U Minh, the provincial administrator implored the Ministry to complete the canals as promised. He argued that half-finished projects were causing water to flood higher than before. A half-finished grid was worse than none at all. Abandonment also threatened to ruin several thousand settlers who had moved there expecting government assistance.[60]

In February 1959, after frustrating exchanges with the provincial administrator, the General Commissioner of Land Settlement convened a conference with President Diệm, the American aid representative (Moorman) and consulting engineers.[61] The winter harvest in the Cà Mau Peninsula had been disastrous. Diệm's Cabinet Minister had authorized immediate payments of cash to families in the settlement zone who had

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[59] Trần Ngọc Cảnh, "Về Việc Khảo Sát và Đào Các Kinh Nhỏ ở U-Minh và Kinh Ranh Hạt," October 10, 1958, TTLTQG2, GTCC C18/1.
[60] Hoàng Văn Lạc, Province Administrator of Kiên Giang to Minister of Public Works, 31 October 1958, TTLTQG2, GTCC C18/1.
[61] "Biên Bản Phiên Nhóm Thảo Luận Về Việc Đào-Vét Kinh Tại Địa-Điểm U Minh," TTLTQG2, GTCC Q 60, 1.

suffered losses. Centers at Mỹ Phước, Thời Bình, and U Minh were flooded, and the canals had done little to drain the soil or prevent salt water from intruding from the nearby coast.[62] Salty and brackish water seeped through parched soils in the dry season and caused the banks to break. Foreign advisors looked for other examples of irrigation projects in peat soil in Holland, the US and Israel; but in none of these circumstances did engineers have to contend with a six-month-long dry season that caused dramatic and sustained intrusions of sea-water into the soils. Unlike clay soils common to the delta, peat acted like a sponge soaking up the salt water. Without steady annual rainfall, only a peat layer inundated by freshwater could resist salt intrusion.[63]

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[62] Trần Lê Quang, Minister of Public Works, Letter to Presidential Cabinet Minister, Sài Gòn, 12 December 1958, TTLTQG2, GTCC Q 60.

[63] "Biên Bản Phiên Nhóm Thảo Luận Về Việc Đào-Vét Kinh Tại Địa-Điểm U Minh," TTLTQG2, GTCC Q 60.

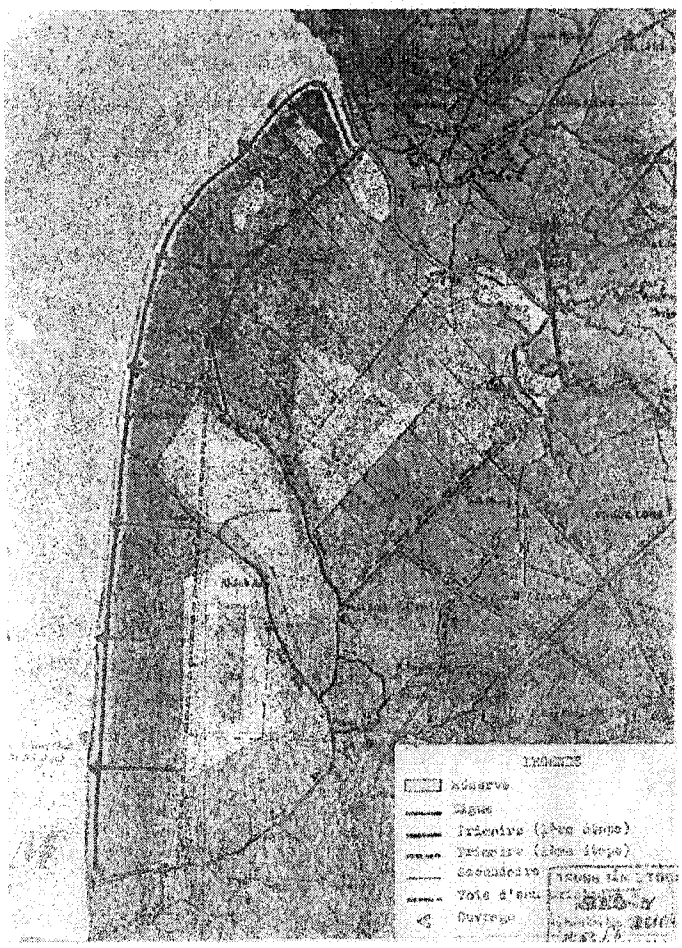


Figure 4.5: U Minh Forest Reserves: The above plan shows the two core areas for forested reserves at U Minh Thượng and U Minh Hạ as proposed in 1943 and revised in 1957. The 1943 plan included a new transverse canal to effectively split through the center of the U Minh Thượng area. The conservation area would also include surrounding dikes to prevent water drainage from within these important freshwater reservoirs. Source: Jammé. "Amenagement Hydraulique des Provinces de Rachgia et Baclieu: Regions de U-Minh | Carte d'Un Avant-Projet Echelle 1/400.000" TTLTQG2: TDBCPNV Folio H62/6.

The meeting effectively ended American support for the reclamation projects, and Diệm together with his engineers began searching for new alternative land settlement models. The group of RVN and foreign engineers proposed building a forest reserve instead of a *casier* at U Minh. This idea was an abandonment of "concretization" and a return to Jammé's ideas in 1943. He recognized the long-term effects of depleting peat soils in

the Mekong Delta. Land clearance and drainage had caused disastrous fires heated by the burning of the peat layer in the dry season.[64] U Minh contained the last major portion of peat forests in the entire delta, so Jammé proposed to concentrate rice agriculture along major streams and contain the rest of U Minh in a forest reserve. He proposed the creation of 60,000 hectares in various reserves, with the three largest being Reserve 391, Reserve 390, and Reserve 389. A few small reserves (321, 322, and 323) encircled saltwater mangroves (*rhizophera*) along the Cái Lớn River (Figure 4.5).[65]

His view towards preserving the mangrove forest, however, was not conservationist but utilitarian:

> "The *tràm* of U-Minh are forever twisted and hollowed. They are neither solid enough, nor straight enough to be used as *Cai công* [pilings] and can at most be employed as firewood."[66]

Conservation of peat soil was important only for the function that the humis-rich soil provided as a freshwater reservoir in the dry season. Allowing an average evaporation of 120 mm/month in shaded soils, Jammé estimated the total freshwater holding capacity for the peat soil to be two billion cubic meters. The idea for a forest reserve that after 1975 became U Minh Thượng National Park originated in Jammé's utilitarian

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[64] "L'Administrateur de Rach Gia a Monsieur le Gouverneur de la Cochinchine au sujet de la petit colonisation dans le Canton de Kien Hao," 1932, TTLTQG2, Fonds Goucoch IB23/096 (12), 3.
[65] Jammé. "Amenagement Hydraulique des Provinces de Rachgia et Baclieu: Regions de U-Minh," TTLTQG2, TDBCPNV H62/6.
[66] Jammé. "Amenagement Hydraulique des Provinces de Rachgia et Baclieu: Regions de U-Minh: Note No. 2253/D du 26 Juillet 1943," TTLTQG2, TDBCPNV H62/6, 2. "Le tràm du U-Minh est parfois tortueux et creux. Il n'est alors ni assez solide, ni assez droit pour servir de Caicong et peut tout au plus être employé comme bois de chauffage."

and economic idea of the forest as a giant water storage sponge with trees "good for nothing but charcoal."[67]

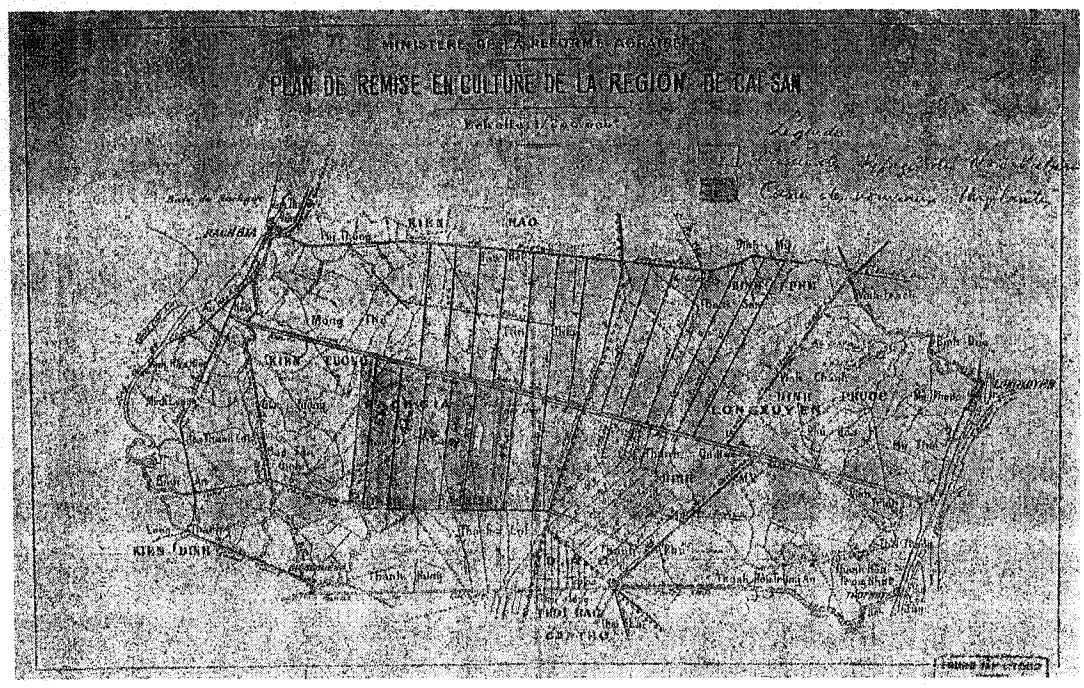


Figure 4.6: Cai Sắn Project. The plan above shows the grids of canals of the Cái Sắn Project. The Rạch Sỏi Canal is the primary axis of the project, linking the lower branch [Hậu Giang] to a creek draining near the Gulf at Rạch Giá. This area, located in a region controlled by both Hoa Hảo than Việt Minh, became the centerpiece of American-backed development in the Mekong Delta. Source: TTLTQG2, PTTDNCH Folio 10016 (1957).

After several stages of development beginning as early as 1956, Cái Sắn became the model project in the 1950's. Located just east of the old *Casier Tonkinois*, Cái Sắn had already been a resettlement site for northern refugees in 1956 before Ordinance 57 designated it as an Agricultural Development Center. American field reconnaissance teams first surveyed the region in December 1955 after RVN officials considered it as one of the better sites for resettlement. Work crews upgraded the main highway

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[67] Ibid., 4.

bisecting the region, and armored cars parked every few hundred yards protected the roadway and patrols of truck convoys. Sporadic fighting west of the road and damaged bridges to the east prevented easy travel far from the highway. The main canal was generally passable for small boats, but *dos d'âne* had formed in large mud banks near the coastal outlet that limited displacement to less than 30 cm. There was little agricultural activity in the region at the time, though the team noted that "large-scale farming methods were used in the past."[68]

The entire project area covered over 150,000 hectares from the lower Mekong (*Hậu Giang*) to Rạch Giá. Rạch Sỏi Canal ran parallel to the highway and had been the primary trunk canal since its construction before 1920. New canals branched off and enclosed the land into smaller parcels that were subdivided further by hand-dug agricultural ditches. (Figure 4.6). The Ministry established to administer land reform designated 77,000 hectares of the region "available" for reclamation. This designation referred to land that was once cultivated and had now been abandoned. It included abandoned plantations, Việt Minh territory, and land where deforestation and droughts had caused severed acidity problems.[69]

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[68] M.H.B. Adler, Chief, Field Service, 15 December 1955, NARAII, RG 469, E. 1456/Box 13.
[69] "Plan de mise en culture d'une zône de 70,000 Ha. de terre: No. 1860-DTCC/55/VP," 24 November 1955, TTLTQG2, PTTDNCH Folio 10016.



Figure 4.7: Rạch Giá Airstrip. Caption on photo reads: "Old Japanese air strip one and a half kilometers East of Rach Gia. 700 meters long and 60 meters wide runway SW-NE" American advisors in 1955 prepared reports of delta areas in preparation for large-scale development projects. As in the north during the First Indochina War, airstrips proved essential for the relay of personnel and equipment into project areas. Roads and canals since 1945 were often impassable. The above photograph was taken during a survey of the area along the Rạch Sỏi Canal and from various airstrips. One of the first efforts in the construction of a development project here was the improvement of this airstrip to a paved runway capable of landing DC-3's and C-46 supply aircraft. Source: NARAII. RG 469. E.1456. Box 13.

Beginning in 1956, 7,500 refugee families moved into newly cleared plots along canals "1-9" and "A-H". A fund of $4 million USD for refugee resettlement was used to provide each family with basic supplies, clothing, seed, and food. Each parcel was 3

hectares, measuring 30 meters along a smaller branch canal and 1000 meters deep.[70] Workers who prepared the canals received 35 piasters (about 1$) per day of work dredging the smaller channels while the American dredges carved out the large main canals.

The region was divided into administrative areas organized by religious affiliation. All but one was a *curé*, a Catholic community that included space in the region for a church and its clergy. In most *cure*, the priest managed resettlement and distribution of government funds. The one exception was on Canal Tân Hiệp where a region was established as a residence quarter for "Buddhists and Protestants". This government-imposed segregation of settlers by religion was a new twist on land reclamation in the Mekong Delta that again reflected Diệm's personal interests in favoring fellow Catholics when possible. By the start of the Agricultural Development Center program in 1957, 42,427 people had moved to Cái Sắn. Of the 6.4 million dollars spent on aid and infrastructure in that year, only 133,000 piasters (less than 100,000 dollars) went to the Buddhist and Protestant zone at Tân Hiệp.[71]

Even before work began on expanding the project, Cái Sắn was famous for increasing problems with corruption. On October 2, 1956 more than 300 protested the pilfering of

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[70] "Plan de mise en culture d'une zône de 70,000 Ha. de terre: No. 1860-DTCC/55/VP," 24 Nov 1955, TTLTQG2, PTTDNCH Folio 10016.

funds between priests and government representatives in the *curé*. Father Nguyễn Bá Lộc was named as one of the worst. He took a cut of 20 piasters per family at each aid disbursal and reported "ghost families" on parcels not yet inhabited to claim extra disbursements. Some families collaborated with the priests in the scam by listing multiple residences in various sectors of the projects to claim multiple disbursements. Priests were found paying laborers 28 of the promised 35 piasters per day, and they had withheld 75 of 250 piasters allotted to each household for nipa palm fronds necessary to construct their houses.[72]

Unlike the works at Đồng Tháp and U Minh, Cái Sắn did not fail for environmental reasons but because of American reluctance to finance the project after seeing reports of corruption. In May 1957, USOM's Agriculture officer met with the Vice-Director of the Land Development Commission and expressed Washington's concern with the misuse of aid. He asserted that in the future, USOM would only proceed on a step-by-step basis, citing a need for more information to confirm proper use of funds.[73] The U.S. Congress continued to delay spending the 11 million USD it had promised to Diệm after the Geneva Accords in 1954. When the Vice-Director asked about this, the

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[71] "Rapport D'evolution Des Travaux a Cái Sán," 6 July 1956, TTLTQG2, PTTDNCH 10016. The author wishes to thank Edward Miller for his thoughts and contributions on the subject of Cái Săn, especially for noticing the discrepancy in aid to Catholics and non-Catholics.
[72] "Phiếu trình kết quả Đầu Tiên cuộc Điều-Tra về hà-lạm và gian lận ở Khu Định-cư Cái-Sắn" [Report on the initial results of the investigation into graft and fraud in the Cái Săn settlement zone], Nha Giám Đốc Cảnh-Sát và Công-an Nam-Việt, 8 October 1956, TTLTQG2, PTTDNCH 10454.
[73] "Phiếu trình," 3 May 1957, Phủ Tổng-Ủy Dinh Điền, TTLTQG2, PTTDNCH 10454.

American representative pointed out that Taiwan, the next largest recipient of US aid in the region, received just 1 million USD for its entire agricultural aid in the same year.[74]

These meetings in 1957-58 signaled the beginning of a split between the U.S. and RVN that would last throughout the duration of the war. American advisors and aid officers remained skeptical of local RVN administration and refused to give RVN officials full access to funds and equipment without first meeting a series of requirements. With regard to proposals for more reclamation projects in the 1958 calendar year, USOM requested the RVN supply the following:

1. An accurate map of the precise area and full economic justification.
2. Detailed plans and time schedule with accurate cost estimates.
3. List of items to be furnished each family together with accurate cost estimates.
4. Carfeully worked out cropping, land management and marketing plans.
5. Cost-benefit analyses.
6. Specific information regarding occupancy rights - i.e., the tenure terms and conditions under which the family will enjoy the land it will occupy.
7. Plans for cooperation and participation by other specialized agencies of government, including arrangements for continuing on-the-ground services to occupants.[75]

This increase in American red tape was incompatible with Diệm's more personal strategies to set up settlements as *đồn điền* or Catholic enclaves. Diệm saw Cái Săn as a

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[74] Ibid.
[75] USOM Saigon, "Considerations Involved in Continued U.S. Aid Support to Economic Land Development," 22 October 1957, TTLTQG2, PTTDNCH 10809.

"security cordon installed in the extreme west of the Long Xuyên - Rạch Giá Region."[76] USOM's representatives, on the other hand, imagined a very different state vision following along the lines of the New Deal reforms in the American Midwest. They envisioned land reclamation, subsidies and new farm machines as a means of directly helping the poorest people in the delta to become landowners.[77] By 1959, activities had ceased at Đồng Tháp and U Minh and slowed at Cái Sắn. Settlers opened 2,989 hectares from 1958 to 1960 and 2,723 hectares from 1960 to 1963.[78]

This brief experiment in land reclamation effectively ended with Americans pulling out their funding and most French consultants moving on to more lucrative contacts. Diệm and his Cabinet drew funds from different aid accounts to support a new kind of settlement known as the "agroville" (*khu trù mật*). Rather than attempt to manage entire regions given a worsening security situation, Diệm imagined these settlements as densely-inhabited urban centers located deep in the countryside. They were designed to demonstrate the attractions of agricultural modernization—fertilizers, tractors, milling machines, and mechanical irrigation. With nearby airstrips and military forts surrounding them, the "agrovilles" would theoretically prevent the kind of infiltration

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[76] "Plan de mise en culture d'une zône de 70,000 Ha. de terre: No. 1860-DTCC/55/VP,"24 November 1955, TTLTQG2, PTTDNCH 10016. "L'execution du présent projet permet la mise en place d'un cordon de sécurité qui sera installé à l'extrême ouest de la région LONGXUYÊN, RACHGIA (à l'extrême limite des terres cultivables, au delà de laquelle on se trouve en présence des terres inondées et des forêts de Tràm)."

[77] Ed Miller, personal correspondence, May 2003.

[78] TTLTQG2, PTTDNCH Folio 15916.

that was becoming increasingly common at U Minh, Đồng Tháp and Cái Sắn.[79] The gradual fragmentation of land projects from Cái Sắn to the "agrovilles" was indicative of a more profound fragmentation in the political alliances between the RVN government and its allies before 1963.

Conclusion

Despite the possibilities for experimentation in the Mekong Delta with American aid and Diệm's brief consolidation of power, these new projects were constrained by a number of important factors. First, they derived almost directly from older colonial approaches to land development through the *casiers*. Such water grids reflected a lack of understanding both of the local environmental conditions and the social causes of land abandonment in the Mekong Delta. In the case of U Minh and Đồng Tháp, project plans were drafted almost directly from pre-1945 plans.

Second, Americans split with Diệm over the projects because they held very different cultural expectations for the projects. Americans imagined a kind of New Deal program that diffused political instability in rural areas by distributing government assistance to all people evenly. Diệm adopted a more traditional Vietnamese approach, choosing to build a network of politically or religiously allied settlements against his perceived

[79] TTLTQG2, PTTDNCH. Folio 13419.

enemies. Finally, two of the projects also failed for environmental reasons. Problems of flooding and salt intrusion ultimately destroyed new farms at Đồng Tháp and U Minh. Like canal projects earlier, these new *casier* projects in "abandoned land" were increasingly viewed by foreign officials and those inside the RVN government as a new "work of Penelope" where a steady inflow of cash, hardware and military protection was necessary to prevent the unraveling of new waterways, highways and resettlement villages.

By far the most important problem for state projects, however, was the social crisis for tenant farmers that had persisted since the days of the "agricultural crisis" in the 1930's. The Việt Minh's establishment of "liberated" areas from 1945 to 1954 complicated the issue by creating for tenants an alternative vision of government built on land redistribution and reduced rents. When American officials met tenants and landowners in these former "liberated" areas, the tenants expressed their views clearly and firmly that what they required from any government was lower rents, credit, and the chance to own land. The continuing inability of Diệm's government to accommodate these requests was an important factor in the failures of projects in the 1950's.

Besides the failures of Diệm's regime, the Revolutionary movement, acting with more international support, manipulated the "undoing" processes of nature to its strategic advantage. In their bid to "liberate" the Mekong Delta, the Việt Minh (and later the

NLF) had become allies of hydraulic nature, using the natural forces of flooding and sedimentation to expand their zones of control and further reduce the old hydraulic "network." This revolutionary alliance with natural hydraulic processes was not born out of any impulse to "destroy civilization" or "liberate nature"; instead it was constructed out of necessity to build an alternative state vision out of spaces that fell outside of the "networks" of the state.

CHAPTER V: INTERVENTION AND ADAPTATION IN A FRAGMENTED LANDSCAPE (1960-1975)

> "We actually had shrimp-tail pumps before we had the Kohlers. In the time fighting the Americans there wasn't a house that didn't have the engines (Kohler 4-6 hp diesel motors). [Kohler engines were used dually for pumping water and outboard boat motors.] When the kids ran away from the enemy soldiers, they took the boats with the engines, lifting the propeller up when they saw *lục bình* [water hyacinth], letting it down again after to keep going. If they got stuck and the *lục bình* prevented them from moving away, then the planes would shoot them dead.
>
> You also needed a water pump to work with the IRRI rice. At first, the University introduced their machines to us (those of us who worked with irrigation) ... but their use wasn't as effective as the farmers. They mounted the engines too high up, causing them to tip over into the water ... the engine got wet, and the spark plug got wet ... not effective. We also used wooden scoops [*sa quạt*] for moving water. But after that, we gave it up for the pumps. Everything takes some time to understand...
>
> -Ông Rỡ [1]

People in Việt Nam use the term "American War" to describe the military conflict characterized by American military, diplomatic and technical involvement from 1954 to 1975, especially the years of escalated military conflict after 1960. American intervention occurred on almost any imaginable front, and field strategies changed constantly in response to shifting political tides in Sài Gòn and Washington as well as in

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[1] Interview 2, Ông Rỡ, April 12, 2002, [113-129]. "Sở dĩ chưa sản xuất nó , chứ đã có máy đuôi tôm. Thời chống Mỹ nhà nào mà không có máy. Con nít ba cao chạy giặc, xách máy chạy, giơ lên, hết lục bình dể xuống dể bơi, lựa lỗ trống dể từ lỗ, từ lỗ, chớ bơi gần lục bình dâu có nổi, máy bay nó bắn chết. Nên khi làm Thần Nông mới sản xuất ra cái máy bơm nước. Mà trước hết là trường Dại Học sản xuất, dưa tụi này (hồi đó làm thủy lợi) bơm thử thì thua nông dân sản xuất. Vì máy ở trên, ống dể chân vịt bơm ngược lên nó ướt mẹ cái máy, bugi ướt hết trơn, không năng suất. Sa quạt bằng gỗ. Sau này bỏ hết làm bơm nước khác. Cái gì cũng qua qúa trình của nó."

response to the military conflict. Hundreds of books cover various aspects of the war—politics, military strategy, local experiences, troop memoirs, etc. With the recent declassification of American archival documents, certainly many more will follow. With appreciation and some apprehension for the scale of this continuing project to understand the American war experience in Việt Nam, this chapter aims to sidestep an American-centered discourse to continue with the historical analysis of water projects and the hydraulic landscape in this era. It continues the question of how shifting political and technical alliances influenced water projects during a sustained period of violent war.

Wartime activities brought unprecedented damage to the delta environment and reduced water projects to fragmented efforts that were frequently interrupted. The amount of explosives used in South Việt Nam by 1970 almost doubled the total US ordnance dropped in World War II; over 70 million liters of herbicides were sprayed eliminating an estimated 10% of Việt Nam's forest cover.[2] The violence of all sides' military actions interrupted projects, surveys, and agriculture in most areas with varying intensities and durations. War further fragmented the landscape from dual, competing ideas of "liberated" and "controlled" regions with their own political and physical infrastructures into so many isolated patches amidst larger, more chaotic "no man's

[2] Föreningen Levande Framtid, "Long Term Consequences of the Việt Nam War: Ecosystems," *Report to the Environmental Conference on Cambodia, Laos & Việt Nam*, Stockholm, 26-28 July 2002, p. 1.

lands" or "wastelands" (*đất bỏ hoàng*): fortified hamlets, guerilla bases, American fire bases, incomplete project sites, and aging remnants of abandoned colonial estates.

Those farmers who survived the war spent years crossing barbed wire, escaping enemy fire, avoiding floods, and adapting to shortages of supplies. While they were often caught in the crossfire between opposing governing forces, farmers were highly adaptive in their use of the natural environment and the range of new technologies introduced as a byproduct of the war. One team of Dutch researchers in 1974 noted how farmers in the Mekong Delta had "ingeneously adapted the principles of water pumps [powered by small diesel 4hp engines]" to locally irrigate their fields while the war-damaged canal network outside either failed to drain water during floods or failed to bring in sufficient water during droughts. The researchers estimated that with more than a million farmers using such pumps by 1974, they exerted a profound influence on larger hydrologic processes in the delta.[3] This kind of influence on the water system was not the result of singularly large new canals or newer systems of dikes but instead millions of isolated water projects located within human-scale constructions of fields and dikes. War underscored the importance of local adaptation.

The physical and conceptual fragments left behind in this period—canals, villages, equipment, and projects—deserve closer historical attention. While they were not

successful in building a systematic regime of water management in the delta, the technologies and ideas introduced in this period were seeds for post-war development. Through the formation of the Mekong Committee in 1957, Vietnamese engineers and scientists together with international consultants and specialists from neighboring countries began a dialogue around the idea of the Mekong Valley as one international hydraulic unit. This political and conceptual shift in water management was a product of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers consultants and other international and local engineers. While war in the region prevented most of the research teams from initiating new constructions, the desk studies and surveys associated with the Mekong Committee before 1975 have played an influential role in post-war development. The Mỹ Thuận Bridge—the first major span bridge crossing the Mekong River in the delta region finished in 2000—was first drafted as a Mekong Committee project by the Nippon Koei Company in 1963.[4] Other project surveys from 1957 onwards often still serve as templates for internationally-funded, large-scale modifications to the river.

Foreign military advisors and their Vietnamese allies also physically transformed the delta landscape in lasting ways. With continuing problems for resettlement at Đồng Tháp, U Minh and Cái Sắn after 1955, the RVN government began a new program in 1959 to build ""agrovilles"" (*khu trù mật*) to concentrate the rural population. By early

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[3] Netherlands Delta Development Team, "Recommendations Concerning Agricultural Development with Improved Water Control in the Mekong Delta: Working Paper VI – Irrigation and Drainage," (Bangkok: ECAFE, 1974), 28.
[4] Committee for Coordination of Investigations of the Lower Mekong Basin, "Annual Report," (Bangkok: ECAFE, 1965).

1962, US advisors and RVN officials moved away from this concept to "strategic hamlets" (*ấp chiến lục*) that were more simply garrisons of barbed wire and guard towers surrounding existing villages. While these isolated settlements failed to separate farmers from the NLF, many of them—like *casiers* and old canals—exerted a lasting influence on the surrounding landscape. Vị Thanh, one of the earliest completed ""agrovilles"" in the delta, has since become a provincial administrative center. These heavily fortified, island-like settlements were also sites for dispersion of various technologies—diesel engines, high yield rice, fertilizer, etc.

This chapter is organized around the spatial idea of fragments; the hydraulic landscape shifted from zones of "liberation" and "control" to one fragmented by unimaginable violence into so many "islands" surrounded by chaos. Wartime events disrupted nearly all efforts to re-connect waterways and rebuild infrastructure. After 1954, a rapidly assembled dredging campaign quickly dissolved into a series of half-complete, abandoned efforts. The persistence of an opposing state visions in the countryside, those articulated by members of both the National Liberation Front and the DRVN, forced Sài Gòn planners into increasingly isolated, futile constructions. "Agrovilles" and "strategic hamlets" became heavily fortified islands where both materials and farmers moved inside and out to a hostile, surrounding environment. These settlements were important points of diffusion for machines and materials that supported rebel movements. They also quickly transformed aspects of everyday life; by 1965, virtually

every family owned a diesel engine for their boat. Finally, the "American War" left many conceptual fragments in the form of abandoned "desk study" projects that were surveyed, drafted and planned but never built.

The "American War" in the Mekong Delta

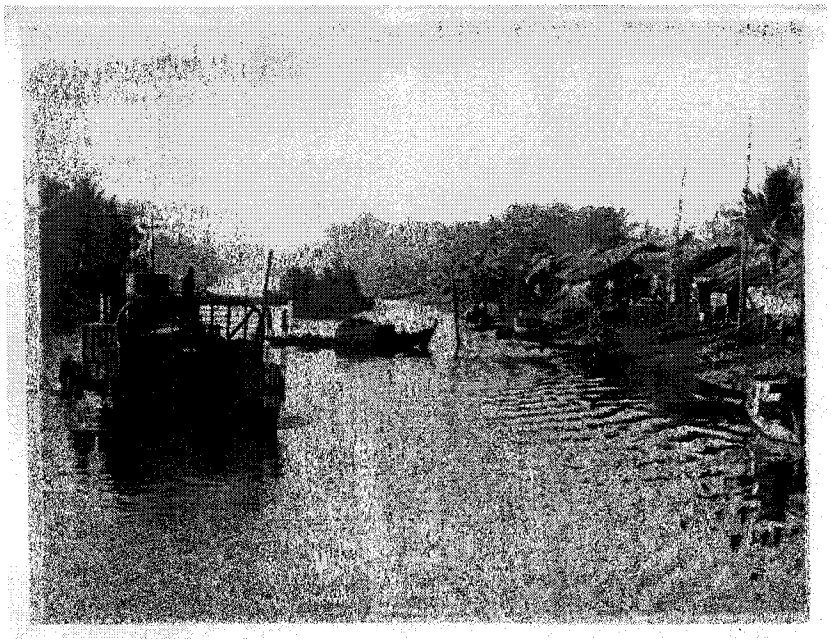


Figure 5.1: Mobile Riverine Force. "Việt Nam – Canal", 1968, NARA, Army Signal Corps Stills SC 647579. Caption: "Two armored troop carriers from the Mobile Riverine Force, maneuver up a small canal in the Mekong Delta looking for enemy troops trying to escape across the waterway. Photographer unknown."

The "American War" involved both military and civilian activities collectively called "pacification" that were part of a deliberate and experimental effort to win the "hearts and minds" of a rural population through constructions of infrastructure, contributions

of agricultural equipment and expertise, and ongoing research.[5] Activities were first carried out under the US Operations Mission (USOM) and through various private contracts such as projects organized by the Michigan State University Group (MSUG) from 1955 to 1962. In 1962, USOM established a Division of Rural Affairs to manage most of the agricultural projects. The early scenario of demonstration projects and research studies changed in 1962 as more intense battles erupted between RVN and NLF troops . After Diệm's assassination in 1963, a series of intra-RVN coups in 1964, the penetration of People's Army (PAVN) troops south of the 17th parallel, and the NLF poised to retake most of the old "liberated" zones again, President Johnson acted quickly to deploy American combat troops. Using the Gulf of Tonkin incident as an excuse, he received Congress' approval to send the first regular combat troops to Việt Nam in March 1965. From the day that Marines landed at Danang, the buildup rose to more than 500,000 troops before withdrawals began in 1969.

1965 also marked an "explosion" in the scale of US technical involvement and physical construction in the Mekong Delta. In one year, as US troops continued to arrive at new installations, USAID delivered 5 new dredges to Việt Nam as foreign aid but in service to the US Navy's public works branch, Office in Charge of Construction (OICC). From 1962 to 1972, OICC spent over 1.9 billion dollars in contracts with the joint venture

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[5] While American accounts of military activities generally begin with the landing of Marines on China Beach in 1965, the Vietnamese term "American War" generally includes the experience of American involvement with the Sài Gòn government since 1954.

Raymond,Morrison, Knudson - Brown , Root and Jones (RMK-BRJ) to construct bases, roadways, runways and other infrastructure.[6] This wave of construction was part of a broader U.S. effort across Southeast Asia to build bases, airports, and naval ports. OICC established national offices in Việt Nam and Thailand to handle the unprecedented level of technical and military assistance delivered to both countries.

In May 1967, President Johnson attempted to consolidate civilian and military activities in rural areas by authorizing a new civilian-military advisory structure called "Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support" (CORDS). The US Military Assistance Command directed the military operations while the Ambassador and Foreign Service staff administered CORDS.[7] CORDS was charged with the following objectives:

1. Improve Pacification Planning
2. Accelerate Refugee Resettlement
3. Attack the VC Infrastructure
4. Expand RVN Armed Forces Capabilities
5. Supplement the Revolutionary Development Team
6. Increase Capability to Handle Refugees
7. Revamp Police and Field Forces
8. Press Land Reform[8]

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[6] U.S. Navy, "PACFACTS News: A Glimpse of PACDIV's Remarkable History," http://www.efdpac.navfac.navy.mil/news/0101/linkHistory.htm .

[7] MACCORDS-PP, "MACCORDS Contribution to the Overview Report on MACV 1968-1970," 15 February 1971, NARA, RG 472.23.C2 CORDS HWG (1967-1973).

[8] Ibid., 2.

These combined reforms and military actions were challenged 9 months later by the NLF during Tết of 1968 when PAVN and NLF forces launched offensives on installations in towns and cities across South Việt Nam. After Tết, the number of US casualties topped those of the Korean War, and on March 31, President Johnson declared that he would not seek re-election, taking personal responsibility for the conduct of the war. In 1968, violence escalated and American troop numbers reached a peak of 543,000. Richard Nixon won the Presidency, vowing to end the war quickly. In July 1969, he instituted the first withdrawals of U.S. troops and began what Americans called the "Vietnamization" of the war effort.[9]

Tết and the American Presidential election in 1968 marked a turning point in the war. While Americans began pulling out, Nixon ordered remaining troops and supporting air and naval groups to support RVN efforts to take the offensive and destroy core NLF areas. The results of these combined missions often involving airstrikes, naval assaults and artillery were to dramatically increase the level of destruction in remote, rural areas. The Mobile Riverine Force (MRF) or "brownwater navy" began supporting these assaults into NLF territory. In response to these actions against the "Việt Công Infrastructure", NLF squads moved to ambush convoys deep within "secure" territory. One such attack on August 8th, 1968, on the Xà No Canal near Nhơn Nghĩa Village

[9] "Việt Nam Chronology," CORDS Historical Working Group Files, 1967-73, RG 472.23.31.

highlights a frequent problem where pointed guerilla attacks would be met with overpowering retaliation that left expansive or "collateral" damage:

> The MRF was ambushed by what 9th Division officers estimate to have been 40 VC. The MRF returned the fire, and then sent troops ashore. Flamethrowers were used. Results of this action as accurately as can presently be determined, were one US wounded, 43 civilians KIA, 43 civilians WIA. There were 250 houses completely burned. Following the engagement, the MRF element continued safely to Cần Thơ.[10]

Two other attacks occurred on the same day near the town of Cái Rằng, a prosperous rice-milling center near Cần Thơ. In this engagement at 8:20 pm, a column of MRF ships 3-5 kilometers long had almost reached the center of Cái Rằng when NLF troops ambushed the rear boat. In the fighting that ensued, the entire column opened fire including use of artillery. 152 homes were destroyed, 7 US were wounded, 14 civilians killed, one ARVN troop killed, 14 ARVN troops wounded, and 145 civilians wounded. There were no NLF casualties reported at any site. The immediate reaction of people in the town was shock that the American boats had attacked them. "The area has been secure so long that people were unable to comprehend why they should be fired on, thus considered it a deliberate US action."[11]

Aerial bombing and artillery shelling into so called "free-fire zones"--what had been "liberated zones" since 1945—almost completely destroyed irrigation networks.

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[10] "Firing Incidents Near Can Tho August 8," August 16, 1968, CORDS Province Reports, NARAII, RG 472.3.

Farmers who had raised rice as tenants on plantations switched their crops to survive the flooding. In the swampy terrain near Phụng Hiệp, aerial bombing was so severe that old waterways such as Saintenoy and Lai Hiếu were silted and overgrown with *lục bình*. Ông Rỡ at Hòa Mỹ recounted his experiences of bombing:

> The bombs in this area were uncountable. This was the central village in the district, a Resistance area. The Americans bombed everywhere, and if they had any bombs left in the day, they dropped them here. At night, the fighter jets from Trà Nóc air base came shooting through the night. We couldn't sleep...many people died then...a few survived. Just imagine you step everywhere and see all of the footprints of the bombs and all of the spent bullets. "Laben" bombs were used the most here. Agent Orange was also dropped here many times, but we couldn't [drain it by] dredging the canals. We could only clear a little bit of silt and debris in the main waterways to make passage for the movement of NLF soldiers. It would take 4 or 5 people with big branches to push the water hyacinths out of the way so they could pass.[12]
>
> The waterways were all torn up. The mosquitoes were ten times as worse as before; because wherever the bombs were dropped, the water was stagnant. The stagnant water produced a lot of mosquitoes! We had a hut made from scrap rubber here; we used it for sleeping when we traveled through here during the war...I'd keep swatting back and forth at them with my head scarf - swat one way and they'd come from the other side - and they still bit me ... There were thousands of them, they just bit me freely-I could not kill them all.[13]

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[11] Ibid., 2.

[12] Interview 2, Ông Rỡ, 12 April 2002, [140-157]. "Bom đạn chỗ này khỏi chệ Bị vì nó là xã điểm của huyện. Vùng căn cứ. Mỹ đi bỏ ở đâu không hiết, nhưng về còn dư đạn bao nhiêu cũng rề bắn. Ban đêm trực thăng chiến đấu ở sân bay Trà Nóc soi bắn sáng đêm, ngủ không được, nên mình còn lại đây là rất ít. Mình hình dung để bàn chân ở đâu cũng có đấu đạn hết. Bom Laben ở đây là nhiều nhất. Chất độc hóa học nó bỏ cũng nhiều lần nhưng kinh rạch thời đó không vét được, chỉ đọn dưới sông cho bộ đội đi mà đọn còn không xiết nữa. Bị vì 1 ấp còn 4,5 đứa dùng sào nạng đưa lục bình cho nó trôi xuống."

[13] Interview 2, Ông Rỡ, 12 April 2002, [160-170]. "Nên kinh rạch rách hết, muỗi gấp 10 lần vì bom bỏ tới đâu, nước thúi tới đó. Nước thúi sanh muỗi dữ lắm. Nghĩa là muốn cất 1 chòi cao su về đi công tác, chuẩn bị về, lột khăn trên đầu qua sanh tử, muỗi sà xuống mặt không chịu nổi. Muỗi cắn no là mệt nghỉ chớ không bắt được."

For the next few years to 1970, intensive military offensives combined with a more radical land reform package briefly expanded RVN influence in some rural areas before the government began to rapidly lose control of the countryside in 1973. The RVN's "Land to the Tiller Act" of March 20, 1970 finally liquidated old landlord titles to "abandoned land" and redistributed it in small parcels to local farmers. The act reduced total permitted land ownership from 100 hectares to 15 hectares, an amount that theoretically could still support investment in mechanization and high-yield technology without leading to concentration of land ownership under a handful of wealthy landlords.[14] A government publication in English for foreign audiences lauded the program in 1971 as "a splendid means to pacification."[15] By mid-1972, the Phong Dinh (Cần Thơ) land reform agency had redistributed 27,391 hectares of an anticipated 55,000 hectares of land through the program. In the larger picture of the war and NLF resistance, however, it was too late. Government forces had abandoned outposts in rural areas to defend key bases and cities like Cần Thơ while the farmers who had gained land from the reforms stayed behind.[16] Conditions deteriorated rapidly after the last stage of American troop withdrawals ended in March 1973. The "American War" effectively ended, and the RVN-NLF/NVA war ended two years later.

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[14] Nguyễn Xuân Lai, "Questions of agrarian structures and agricultural development in southern Việt Nam," *Vietnamese Studies*, No. 5 (75) (1984), 31-32.

[15] RVN, "Summary of the Land-to-the-Tiller Program," TTLTQG2, NL 4843 (1971), 88.

[16] 3 May 1972, "Phong Dinh Province Report," CORDS Province Reports, NARAII, RG 472.3.

War profoundly altered the physical landscape in the Mekong Delta. The buildup of American forces in the early 1960's resulted in the rapid construction of airstrips, highways, bases, and strategic installations. The escalation of violence resulted in the near-total annihilation of forests through artillery and chemical defoliants in areas such as U Minh that were "cradles of the Revolution." The idea of the delta as a continuous landscape split into regions of "controlled" and "liberated" areas was replaced in this era by a delta fractured into so many concentrated islands of control or liberation: bases, "strategic hamlets," shelters, cities, etc.

The Water Network During the War

The experiences of the RVN dredging program during the war illustrate the difficulties that engineers faced in traversing such an island-like landscape. Canal dredging was a central facet of RVN efforts to regain control of the delta by reconnecting the major lines of the water network. In 1955, USOM contributed new equipment and organized training for Vietnamese crews. Operating a dredge fleet, however, was complicated by the lack of training and even more by the presence of the former colonial dredging enterprise. SFEDTP had for more than fifty years directed all major dredging operations in the delta, and the enterprise continued as a private contractor to the Americans and the RVN government after 1954. USOM hired SFEDTP to train Vietnamese personnel and oversee preparation of the new fleet, but SFEDTP personnel

were lax to assist the Vietnamese because it would have created a direct competitor. A year later, politicians in Washington pointed to USOM's assistance with the dredging as an example of American tax dollars being wasted on corrupt activities in Việt Nam. Senator Ellender, a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, criticized the International Cooperative Assistance program for fully financing the $2.5m USD purchase of the dredges and allowing them to be used to improve private land.[17]

The land in this particular case was an area of wooden houses set on former swamp fill between the downtown Sài Gòn Rue Galieni and the Arroyo Chinoise. During Diệm's battles with sects to consolidate power in Sài Gòn in 1954, the neighborhood burned to the ground. A USOM advisor on ports and waterways clarified why dredges were sent to restore this area:

> "After the holocaust there remained a blackened area oozing with filth and mud…Actually when we were asked if the dredge could be used to reclaim this area we jumped at the chance…in a matter of days new houses sprung from the ground as if by magic. The Vietnamese were proud of this job and the morale instilled in the dredging division has never diminished."[18]

Despite such reports from the field, Congress omitted future funding for dredging in Việt Nam including even support for training and maintenance of existing dredges. The political reversal left $2.5m worth of machinery without capable operators and any sort of efficient repair facility. The French contractor remained reluctant to train

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[17] Raymond T. Moyer to Leland Barrows, 13 July 1956, NARAII, RG469.E1456.Box 15.

[18] D.F. McCauley, 23 July 1956, NARAII, RG469.E1456.Box 15.

Vietnamese personnel.[19] As conditions worsened by 1958, USOM managed the American dredges, finally moving them from more remote development projects to Cái Sắn before the NLF renewed its attacks on dredges and infrastructure in 1959.

Following Kennedy's election as President in 1960, the newly organized U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in 1961 signed new contracts to send more dredges to Việt Nam. The US Ambassador, Frederick Nolting, Jr., spoke at the delivery ceremony for one of these dredges, the Kim Giang, on the waterfront in Sài Gòn in August. It had been manufactured at a Japanese shipyard with extra-thick steel on the hull to offer more protection against small arms. In a historical parallel to Governor General Pasquier's 1930 inaugural speech at Rạch Giá, Nolting pointed to the dredge as a kind of "instrument of Progress." Speaking from a makeshift pavilion on the bank of the Sài Gòn River he said:

> Esteemed Minister, coming here today, I can not help but think about the differences between a Government of free people that benefits all of its citizens and a regime built upon foreign ideology, using repression and violence as a means to dominate and enslave the people.
>
> The Kim Giang here is not just proof of the cooperation between two free peoples, it is also part of a combined struggle to build a better world and a life that is more satisfying for humankind…Esteemed Minister, I along with Mr. Gardiner and our American colleagues wish for the Government and the People to realize success in the development of the waterway system. I envision one

[19] J.J. Campbell, 16 October 1956, NARAII. RG469.E1456.Box 15.

> day in the near future when every village in the Mekong Delta will become a center for peace and prosperity.[20]

The language of this speech invoked the physical presence of the dredge itself as "proof" of American and RVN "progress". Like the Governor-General before him, Nolting characterized the RVN's political opposition as "repressive" and "violent." With twin diesel engines and cutter-suction apparatus, the Kim Giang would ideally convert a chaotic landscape of silted waterways blocked in part by NLF saboteurs (and from war in general) into a functioning network of waterways.

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[20] "Diễn văn của Đại Sứ Hoa Kỳ Frederick Nolting Jr. đọc tại buổi lễ chuyển giao xáng Kim Giang ngày 31 tháng 8 năm 1961," TTLTQG2, GTCC C15714.

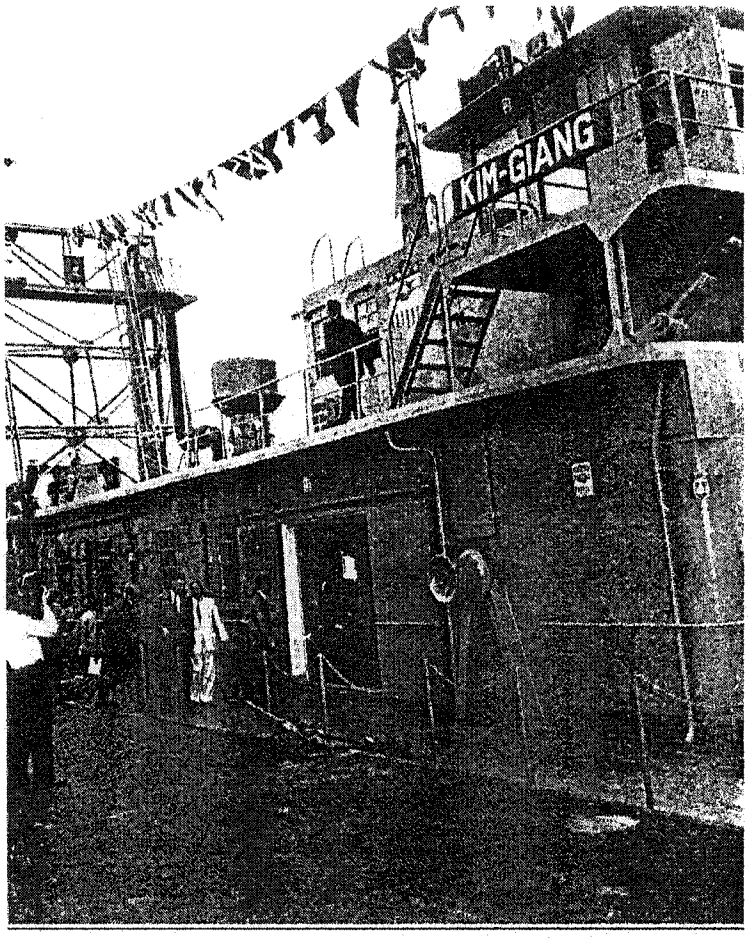


Figure 5.2: Kim Giang Dredge 1961: The above image shows Ambassador Nolting and the Minister of Public Works touring the newly delivered dredge. Note the cameraman filming the event in the lower left corner of the image and the USAID emblem of the two clasped hands on the upper deck of the ship. Source: "Kim Giang Dredge Ceremony". 31 August 1961. LTQG2, GTCC, Folio C55714.

Despite the scale of American aid, the dredging program continued to face major technical and administrative setbacks. One of the biggest barriers was the loss of experienced personnel to the military draft. The government refused to allow deferrals for men operating the dredges, so with each new round of drafts, experienced crew

members left to be replaced by novices. [21] Security at dredging sites was also a problem. From January 1962, there were regular incidents of guerilla attacks on dredges and crews. It became increasingly commonplace for civilian and military personnel to be killed, wounded or captured at project sites. In March, 1962, eleven crew members of the "U Minh" were kidnapped while working on the canals at the Vị Thanh airstrip and settlement. They were released two days later unharmed.[22]

Even without problems of Việt Công attacks on dredges, the wartime fragmentation of the landscape into shifting areas of secure and insecure zones caused delays. Seen from Sài Gòn, the lack of security in the countryside prevented a realistic, economical scheduling of operation, even in secure areas. Dredges typically had to cross through unsecured areas en route to sites. The convoy of dredge and supporting equipment required a military escort with upwards of 400 soldiers placed at intervals along the canal banks. Another problem in moving through the delta was the distance of the central repair shop to most of the sites. The yard was located at Phú An near Sài Gòn in Military Zone III while 80% of the projects were located in Military Zone IV. In some cases, dredges were even subject to ARVN and American military officers commandeering the vessel for immediate military operations.[23]

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[21] DMJM, "Preliminary Economic and Engineering Study: Dredging Program," TTLTQG2, NL504.
[22] Ibid., 37.
[23] Ibid.

These problems worsened as the RVN government prioritized new canal projects in some of the most contested areas. After receiving the Kim Giang in 1961, Public Works sent the dredge to dig and widen several new canals in Đồng Tháp. Phước Xuyên (Good Fortune Way) or Công Hoà (Republic) Canal was a special project intended to link settlements in Đồng Tháp to the Cambodian border. The canal traveled 33.4 km from Canal 4 Bis at Gẫy Cờ Đen to Rạch Cái Cá; Cái Cá was a navigable creek that crossed the Cambodian border. An army of unpaid "corvée" laborers dug the path of the canal along the nearby the Agricultural Development Center settlement planned in 1956. Diệm attended an inauguration ceremony in 1958 and is pictured cutting a small ribbon while villagers looked on (Figure 5.3). Within a few months, the banks had caved in and long segments of the canal disappeared after unusually high floods in September – October receded.

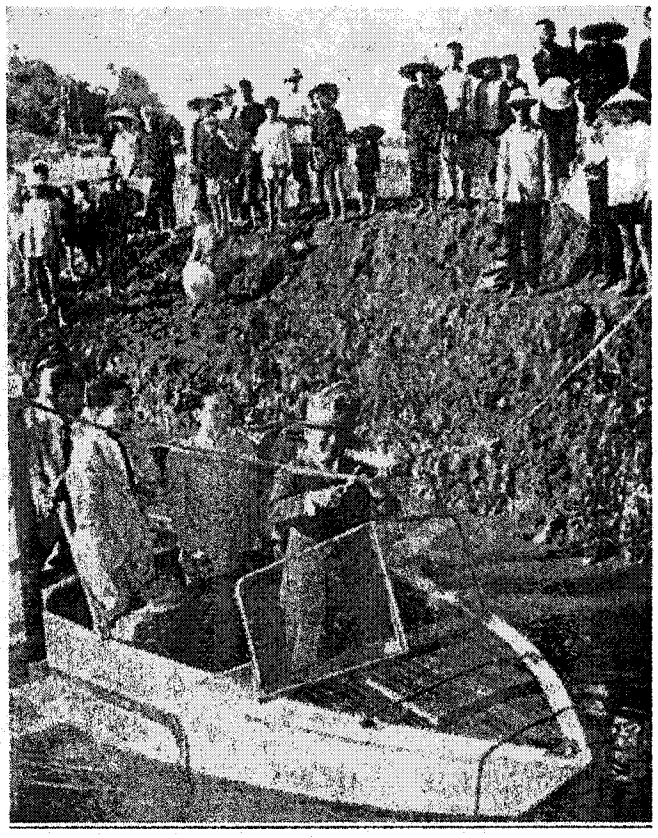


Figure 5.3: Phước Xuyên Canal Inauguration. Ngô Đình Diệm is depicted in his characteristic fedora cutting a ribbon to inaugurate a hastily completed Phước Xuyên Canal on 22 June 1958. The canal at this point was less than 10 meters wide, and the bank where local people are standing suggests an uneven and hastily completed construction. Source: Ngô Đình Diệm. *Con Đường Chính Nghĩa Độc Lập Dân Chủ*. Saigon (1958).

With strong urging from US military advisors, Public Works sent the Kim Giang to re-dredge this canal to a width of 35 meters and a depth of 3.5 meters that would allow gunboats to patrol this core area of the NLF. The project cost more than 26.4 million piasters (1m USD) and lasted 29 months before Public Works abandoned it.[24] NLF

[24] Bộ Trưởng Công-Chánh k/g Tổng Thống Việt Nam Cộng Hòa. TTLTQG2, GTCC 55704, 1.

units repeatedly attacked the dredge in 1963, so Public Works opted to complete the canal again with conscripted crews of laborers.[25]

With the deployment of regular American troops in 1965, dredging programs expanded rapidly, though mostly for isolated military base projects and alongside new highways. USAID sent four new dredges to the fleet (for a total of 14), though these dredges plus one earlier machine were exclusively used by the US Navy's OICC and American contractors for airstrips, ports and roadways.

Besides safety issues in the countryside, one of the greatest challenges to dredging in Việt Nam was the unprecedented length of the supply line for spare parts. Replacement parts such as fuel injectors started their journey to Việt Nam in Baltimore, Holland or Japan before passing through local procurement and import procedures and being delivered to the yard. Then they traveled through military commands and, possibly, ambushes before reaching a stranded crew on one of the dredges. The wait for something as small as a fuel injector might hold up a dredge in the countryside for days or even weeks.[26] Facing these delays and the target that such stalled machinery presented to NLF patrols, crew members often adapted local materials and tools to repair the machinery. One American observer noted:

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[25] "v/v an ninh các công trường máy xáng," 1 June 1962. , TTLTQG, GTCC 1846/6.

[26] DMJM, "Preliminary Economic and Engineering Study," 24.

> The only saving feature has been the ability of the Vietnamese artisan to improvise and make do with basic tools. A 24-inch cast iron pipe is attacked with a hand hacksaw. Half inch steel plate can be cut with a hammer and cold chisel...[27]

New canals, especially those in the Plain of Reeds, also suffered from the barrage of natural catastrophes that destroyed earlier projects. At Mộc Hoá on the Vàm Cỏ Tây River, local engineers and military officers complained that the new canal failed to drain water or reduce acidity. Planting was not possible along the new canal just as in years past. Leaders worried that new settlers were becoming angry and frustrated with the relocation program and thus more ready to join the NLF.[28] Unusually high floods in 1966 also helped the NLF make strategic gains as farmers fled the settlements by boat. NLF troops effectively controlled local travel between Mộc Hóa and Cai Lậy. Only women and children were permitted to cross the flooded terrain. All government officials, soldiers, or businessmen who attempted to cross were subject to having their boat seized or destroyed. The flood destroyed bridges and effectively limited movement by road. Total damage was estimated at more than 16 million piasters.[29]

Despite these persistently bad conditions in Đồng Tháp, the Government and USOM continued to move migrants and refugees there. In 1962-63, 4,800 families of Hoa Hảo

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Sở Hàng Hà. Nha Thủy Vận, "Tình Mộc Hoá Chương Trình Công Tác Đào Kinh và Bồi Lấp," 6 September 1968, TTLTQG2, GTCC 1380/9.

[29] "Bảng Thuyết Trình của Kỹ Sư, Trương Ty Conng Chánh Kiến Tường," 8 December 1966, TTLTQG2, GTCC 1341/03.

people moved to the Tràm Chim/Gò Da Canal (Areas 8-9-10-11). The selection of people from the Hoa Hảo religious sect to settle here was a strategic move to undermine NLF activity, since at the time local Hoa Hảo leaders supported the RVN. A total of 26,662 people settled on 25,431 hectares of land in this western reach of the new waterways to the Cambodian border.[30] The persistence of flooding and acid soils, however, prevented these settlers from establishing farms in the "abandoned lands". Since 1955, more than 80,000 persons—both immigrants from North Việt Nam and local migrants—moved to settlements in the region, and the majority of these immigrants eventually fled the region during bad floods.

As fighting intensified in 1968, vital links of the canal network were often compromised, further reducing Government abilities to improve irrigation. At Sóc Trang, the provincial administrator complained that despite repeated requests, there had been no dredging of channels around the Bãi Xâu river port since 1945. The compounded effects of siltation and flooding in area canals caused water levels to rise just 6 inches below the surface of the main highway connecting Sóc Trang to Cần Thơ (and Sài Gòn). In the dry season, the channel was just half a meter wide in places.[31] Of five dredges delivered in 1965, one was promised to Sóc Trang; but these dredges only

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[30] Tỉnh Trưởng Kiến Phong k/g Ông Tổng Trưởng Cải Tiến Nông Thôn Saigon, 17 April 1964, TTLTQG2, GTCC 2318-05.

[31] Thiếu Tá Đào Ngọc Điệp, Tỉnh Trưởng Ba-Xuyên k/g Ông Tổng Trưởng Bộ Công Chánh và Giáo Thông, 13 May 1965, TTLTQG2, GTCC 557/4.

served the OICC where they were perpetually tied up in projects at military installations.[32]

The rapid construction of airstrips in the delta required dredges to prepare the elevated land base for the runways. The US command redirected the Kim Giang to one such project, the Cần Thơ airbase.[33] An American joint-venture contractor, RMK-BRJ, directed the project with support from USOM and OICC.[34] Dredges also operated at smaller airstrips and around US bases. Vị Thanh, first proposed as an "agroville" in 1960 became a strategic hamlet with a neighboring airfield for helicopter refueling on missions south from Sài Gòn to NLF-controlled areas around U Minh (Figure 5.4). The increasing intensity of the conflict from 1965 until 1975 effectively prevented significant repairs or improvements to major canals in the region. By October 1974, NLF and NVA troops controlled most of the countryside in the delta and launched increasingly lethal attacks on dredges that ventured beyond the cities and towns. In 1974, the "Hoa Mỹ" was hit with mortars during a routine operation and destroyed beyond repair. Public Works boats towed the skeleton of the craft to the yards at Phú An.

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[32] "v/v trùng tụ kinh Phụng Hiệp-Sóc Trang," 9 December 1965, TTLTQG2, GTCC 557/4.

[33] Văn Phòng Tổng Trưởng. No. 4449, 4 October 1965, TTLTQG2, GTCC 557/4.

[34] "Ủy Viên Giáo Thông Công Chánh k/g Thiếu Tướng Tư Lệnh Vùng 4 Chiến Thuật," 26 April 1965, TTLTQG2, GTCC 2318/18.

Fortified Hamlets as Islands of Dispersal

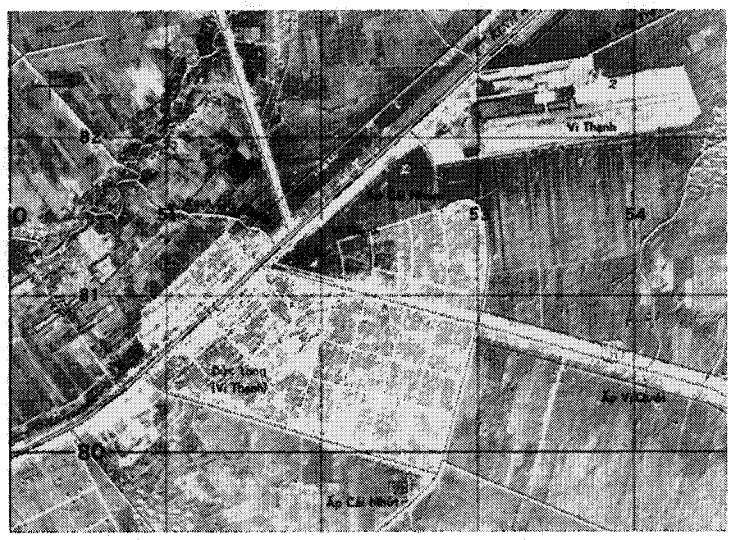


Figure 5.4: Vị Thanh Agroville and Airstrip, 1965. The image above shows the rectilinear canal and road grid constructed for one of the pilot "agrovilles" in 1960 at the village of Vị Thanh along the Xà No Canal. Southwest of Vị Thanh was another grid of parcels dug for the Hoa Lưu agroville. Even after the RVN abandoned the agroville policy in 1961, RVN and American military forces continued to occupy the airstrip and there were RVN offices located close to the Xà No Canal. Source: U.S. Army Mapping Service. "Việt Nam 1:25,000" L8021 Pictomap Supplement Series, Sheet 6028 I South.

The failures to repair or extend the water network and the escalation of violence in the 1960's left many villages completely isolated like islands in the wartorn landscape. RVN programs to construct isolated, fortified villages pushed this sense of isolation even further. The government began organization of concentrated city-like settlements called "agrovilles" in 1959 and, later, what became known as "strategic hamlets."

"Agrovilles" were larger, town-sized constructions for 400-600 households built along waterways and major highways. Each plot of land included approximately 100 square

meters for domestic livestock and a vegetable garden. The campaign to build these centers in 1959 was in part a response to failures in the resettlement centers at U Minh and Đồng Tháp where the NLF had effectively reconstituted "liberated zones". "Dense and prosperous zones" (*khu trù mật*) or "agrovilles" were designed to be residential communities with garden plots where families would live separately from their crops but closer to government services and surveillance. Agroville planners hoped to control peasant movement and deny information to the NLF. The concentration of people into one area arguably also supported more efficient organization of "modern" services such as schools, maternity clinics, agricultural extension agents and agricultural machinery.[35]

In strategic terms, the "agrovilles" failed to win over rural peasants or improve the government's position. Besides being forced to dig the grid of new canals without remuneration, farmers did not receive sufficient funds to move their entire household. They left traditional homesteads surrounded by shade trees, ancestral tombs, and fields for a barren checkerboard of square plots with clay baked hard under the sun.[36] Besides the cultural dislocation caused by removing families from their ancestral tombs, the distance to fields prevented farmers from stopping crop damage and theft.

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[35] For a description of "agrovilles" (1959-1961) see Joseph J Zasloff, "Rural Resettlement in South Viet Nam: The Agroville Program," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Winter, 1962-1963), 327-340.

[36] Zasloff, 336.

American advisors encouraged Diệm and his cabinet to consider alternative forms of concentrating and fortifying rural populations. The large spaces between households in the "agrovilles" allowed guerillas easy access because there was no defensible center. It was impossible to construct an effective defensive perimeter.[37] Diệm's brother, Ngô Đình Nhu, pushed forward with what became known as the "strategic hamlet" program in 1961. The basic idea of the strategic hamlet was instead of relocating farmers into distant, urban grids, the government would fortify existing villages and organize local self defense militias.

Unlike the characteristic grids of the "agrovilles", there was no common form to strategic hamlets. Some, like Vị Thanh, were constructed on top of the old agroville checkerboard and included more protective elements such as heavy artillery, gun towers, barbed wire, and earthen walls. Other strategic hamlets might only have barbed wire and a few sandbag placements. Nhu classified strategic hamlets into three types depending on the relative security of the region. In "A" areas with the least NLF threat, the government organized village self-defense militias. In less secure "B" areas, strategic hamlets required outside military assistance. In "C" areas that were strongly occupied by the NLF, Nhu proposed further development of large settlements like the "agrovilles" to function as reeducation camps for NLF sympathizers with extensive

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[37] Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, William E. Colby Oral History Interview I, 6/2/81, by Ted Gittinger, http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/oralhistory.hom/Colby/colby-01.pdf, , p. 16.

ARVN military protection.[38] Such fortified settlements replaced settlement *casiers* in the 1960's as the primary model for government-directed settlement.

From the perspective of ARVN and US military personnel, the hamlets and nearby airstrips were like so many small islands of dredged and paved earth in a sea of nebulous and uncontrolled enemy activity. Troops hopped from site to site by helicopter and airplane, regarding the vast spaces of flooded and overgrown fields in between as "free fire zones" or "no man's lands".

From the perspective of local farmers (especially those who supported the NLF and lived inside strategic hamlets), centers like Vị Thanh were more permeable islands. They were important as places for the dispersal of new technology, medicines, and materials important to the Revolution. Vendors in larger settlements like Vị Thanh sold all kind of machines: 4-6hp engines, high-yield rice, radios, water pumps, and small rice mills. American advisors, mostly civilians working through USAID programs, worked with Vietnamese colleagues from universities to promote use of the agricultural machinery in efforts to "win hearts and minds."

Ông Diệu recalled American agricultural advisors working at Vị Thanh:

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[38] Sheehan et al., *Pentagon Papers*, 681-682.

> The Americans, they came to help with the Agriculture Bureau and develop the technology to grow Thần Nông [IRRI High-Yield Rice, then IR26]. No foreigners came here for business, because this place was so dangerous! War and bombs happened every day. The Việt Công "fathers" shot in, and the American [troops] went out to terrorize...Oh my God!...I survived to now thanks to the best luck! So terrible! It was not a normal thing! This place was like a bombing range. At that time, in the Sài Gòn capital, an American soldier would die of fright if he heard he was going to Chương Thiện! The war here was 24/24![39]

> ...I met them, because I worked with agriculture, so I knew many people at the Agriculture Bureau. The Agriculture Bureau had the job of giving Thần Nông to people around, to sell fertilizers and pesticides, and agricultural tools... The [American] guys instructed us how to grow it but they didn't do it as carefully as the Revolution people are doing nowadays...[40]

Distribution of IRRI rice, fertilizers and pesticides, however, only reached a few kilometers beyond the perimeter of Vị Thanh within the "safe zones." In NLF-controlled areas further out, farmers who chose not to move to the strategic hamlets grew "traditional rice" that produced lower yields but required less water and fertilizer.

While fertilizers and pesticides did not travel far into rebel territory, motor equipment did. Engines were quickly dispersed and resold from "controlled" centers deep into

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[39] Interview 8, Ông Diệu, April 19, 2003, [043-080, B]. "Chỉ có người Mỹ giúp đỡ ty nông vụ và giúp về kỹ thuật trồng Thần Nông. Người nước ngoài không vô dây để kinh doanh gì hết. Bởi vì chỗ này hồi xưa ớn lắm! Chiến tranh, giặc giã không, pháo kích ngày nào cũng "dùng ì" "dùng ì" ... Mấy cha Việt Cộng bắn vô, ở trong này di ra khủng bố ... trời ơi! ... Tôi sống được tới bây giờ không biết là phước bao lớn! Ghê lắm! Chứ không phải chuyện thường. Chỗ này là chỗ khói lửa...Hồi xưa, ở trên thủ đô Sai Gòn, sĩ quan hay lính nào mà nghe nói bị đổi về Chương Thiện là nó sợ gần chết! Chỗ này là chỗ chiến tranh 24 / 24!

[40] Interview 8, Ông Diệu, April 19, 2003 [306-350]. Tui có gặp, vì tui làm nông nghiệp cũng làm quen biết nhiều ở ty nông vụ. Ty nông vụ có nhiệm vụ cấp giống Thần Nông cho nhân dân ở khu Trù Mật bán phân bón và một số ít thuốc bảo vệ thực vật, bán giống Thần Nông, và nó cũng cho một số dụng cụ cầm tay phục vụ nông nghiệp như leng cuốc. Nó hướng dẫn cho mình trồng lúa nhưng đại khái thôi chứ không như mấy ông cách mạng bây giờ dạy rất kỹ.

"liberated" territory. By 1963, an estimated 8 in 10 families across the delta owned one of these motors.[41] Ông Bảy Long recalled seeing the first American diesel motors in the Hỏa Lựu area south of Vị Thanh in 1954-1956. By 1960, shops in Vị Thanh sold Kohlers, "BS" (Briggs & Stratton), and a range of other makes commonly referred to as *máy Kohler*. By 1963 almost every family owned one engine, using it alternatively for irrigation and transportation. Ông Bảy Long, who lived and fought in "liberated" territory outside Vị Thanh, spoke about how the motors reduced his travel time to the local market from five hours to one.[42]

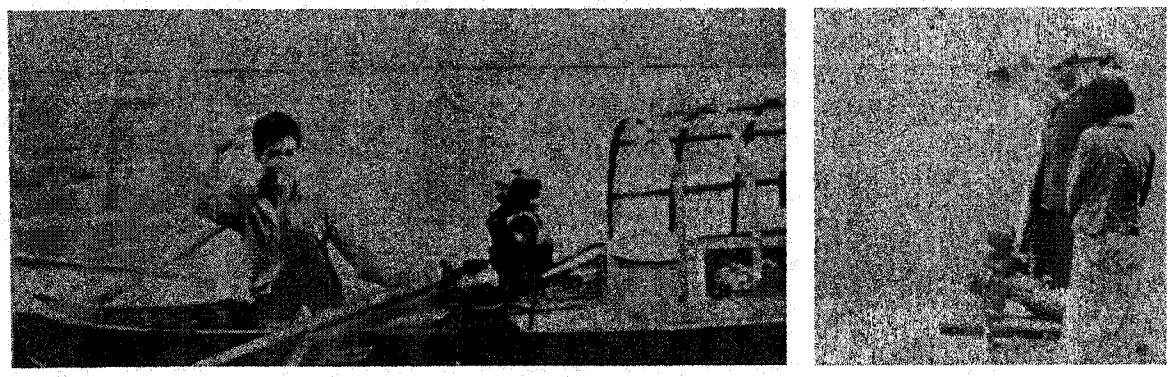


Figure 5.5: Kohler Engines Used for Boats and Pumping. The above pictures appeared in a 1970 pamphlet sent by the Kohler Company of Kohler, Wisconsin titled "Kohler Engines: Preferred Power Around the World." The same engine could be easily swapped for use from pumping water into a field to powering a small boat such as the one pictured above. Source: Kohler Co. Newsletter. "Kohler Engines in Action," Vol. 11, No. 3 (1970).

A similar phenomenon happened with small, affordable rice milling machinery. The Japanese-manufactured "Yanmar" rice mill was sold in the larger towns of Mỹ Tho,

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Bây giờ làm chắc ăn lắm. Hồi xưa tụi nó dạy lớt lớt không hà, nông dân có người làm trúng, có người thất bỏ mạng, vì sâu rầy phá hoại nặng, chịu không nổi.

[41] Interview 8, Ông Diệu, April 19, 2003 [365].

[42] Interview 7, Ông Bảy Long, April 18, 2003 [284-339].

Bạc Liêu, Vĩnh Long, and Long Xuyên. An American study noted the rapid sale of the small mills and focused on the RVN's attempts to restrict sales because local milling upset the owners of the large mills who had controlled rice milling for decades. In Gía Rai District (Bạc Liêu), one American advisor estimated that as many as 60 "Yanmar" mills were in service. The introduction of these mills presented a direct economic challenge to predominantly ethnic-Chinese families who controlled milling as a monopoly since before 1954. The RVN charged high fees for mill licenses, in effect preserving the Chinese monopoly. Licensed firms paid province officials an estimated $200,000 Piasters ($30,000 USD) per year to keep their monopolies. A former province chief used his cut from the license receipts to buy semi-annual draft deferments.[43]

The RVN and owners of the older mills attempted to prevent the continued sale of the mobile mills because they threatened older modes of business. Attempting to ban the use of small mills was not only counter-productive, but it also led to sales of the mills to NLF units that operated outside government laws anyway. NLF operators in Bạc Liêu even sold rice at markets at lower prices to undermine the influence of the old mills. An advisor concluded about this tactic:

> "They could gain rice, political support, and seriously damage GVN tax revenues by such a tactic. If the people are allowed to operate the mills themselves, with a minimum of GVN harassment, the Government stands to

[43] Stevenson McIlvaine. "Small Rice Mills in the Mekong Delta," 6 February 1970. Pacification Studies Group, NARAII, RG 472, CORDS Historical Working Group Files 1967-73, Box Number 22, Declassified: 994025.

> gain political support and break the Chinese stranglehold over the economy of the Delta. A responsive government, not economic controls, is the key to successful counterinsurgency."[44]

Dispersals of technology and materials from these fortified islands coincided with waves of physical damage and destruction in the *"liberated"* zones between them. These regions were routinely decimated by bombing, strafing, artillery, troop movement, and small weapons fire during battles outside the strategic hamlets and towns. These military disruptions often left NLF troops and farmers without fuel, medicine, or food. Survival in these "no man's lands" depended largely on the use of locally available substitutes.

Farmers often switched crops to adapt to the increased flooding. At Hoà Mỹ, they planted tobacco instead of rice. They built island-like banks of clay dredged from the flooded fields. They cured tobacco in the sun and took it by boat to the market at Long Mỹ where there was land more suitable for rice. Rice in many regions became so scarce that a boat filled with sugar or tobacco traded for one boat of rice. In normal circumstances, a boat of sugar might trade for three or four boats of rice.[45]

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[44] Ibid., 4.

[45] Interview 2, Ông Rỡ [320-340].

NLF field hospitals often relied on local substitutes even for the most basic supplies. People used coconut juice as a substitute for saline solution because of its sterility. One farmer recalled:

> We'd cut away the outer husk, then we'd stick the needle into the middle of the coconut. Other soldiers that were injured, they had penicillin and bromine solution [mercurochrome]. On the inside they used only saline solution. We then used honey to apply to the wound, then we bandaged it.[46]

The presence of war and the disruptions it brought from the bases and strategic hamlets out into the countryside forced a kind of reverse technology transfer to take place with respect to medicine and even fuel. Fuel was also difficult to obtain for households in the liberated zones; people saved it for their boats and water pumps. During severe shortages, farmers used the oleoresinous nut of the Calophyllum tree [cây *mù u*] as a lantern wick. They pounded the nut until it formed a fibrous pulp; then they drew it into a long wick and burned one end of it to produce a flame. Others used animal fats from pigs or field rats as lighting fuel.[47]

One of the most well-known if not the most damaging effects of the American War in the delta was chemical defoliation. It began as method of clearing lines of communication (LOC's) in 1961. Herbicides that were first used in Texas cotton fields

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[46] Interview 1, Ông Mười, [282-308]. "Vạc, rồi đứt cây kim vô trỏng. Chiến thương mà bị thương, ở ngoài có Peniciline, thuốc đỏ. Ở trỏng chiến thương chỉ lấy nước muối rửa. Người ta lấy mật ong phết vô, băng bó."

[47] Interview 7, Ông Bảy Long, April 18, 2003 [433-469].

in the late 1950's (to clear plant foliage before picking) were introduced in 1961 to clear forest cover along major waterways such as the Sài Gòn River. Use of defoliants increased in 1965 as part of "pacification" campaigns. US and RVN forces used herbicides as an offensive weapon to deny cover to the enemy. By 1967, the annual volume of herbicides used was nine times the 1965 level. This trend continued to 1970 before the military began to restrict its use.[48]

The terms Agent Orange, Agent White and Agent Blue referred to the colored bands painted on the outside of containers so that soldiers could distinguish them. Agent Orange, the most commonly applied chemical used until the late 1960's, was a 50:50 mixture of 2,4,5-T and 2,4-D. It contained high levels of dioxin as a chemical byproduct in its manufacture. It was used primarily against forest vegetation. Agent White, used for an estimated 35% of all missions, contained 20% picloram and 80% isoprophlamin. It was introduced in late 1966 and used for deforestation missions. Agent Blue, used for an estimated 15% of all missions to 1970 was a form of arsenic and was used specifically for killing food crops.[49]

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[48] CORDS Pacification Studies Group, "Use of Herbicides," CORDS HWG, NARAII, RG 472.3, 1.

[49] More precise compositions of defoliants are: Agent ORANGE: 2,4-dichlorophenoxyacetic acid and 2,4,5-tricholorophenoxyacetic acid; Agent WHITE: tri-iso-propanolamine salts of 2,4-D and 4-amino-3,5,6-tricholoropicolinic acid in water; Agent BLUE: sodium dimethyl arsenate and dimethyl arsenic acid in water. Barry Weisberg, *Ecocide in Indochina: The Ecology of War* (San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1970), 19.

While the effects of spraying were generally limited to relatively isolated geographical areas, no single weapon garnered more opposition from so many different groups—NLF , North Việt Nam, RVN, American veterans, environmental activists abroad, and anti-war activists. The most controversial aspect of defoliants was their uncontrollable impact both in local ecosystems and in the fears of local people. Sprayed aerially from converted C-123 cargo transport aircraft, the chemicals spread beyond military targets to cover entire villages, water supplies, "friendly" troops on the ground, and even the operators inside the aircraft. By 1970, the defoliation program was a scapegoat for a host of unrelated problems. A 1970 CORDS report on herbicide use described one of their biggest liabilies in the following manner:

> Presently it is necessary only for an airplane with a spray rig to fly over, or the sight of a vehicle or man-packed apparatus, to generate a rash of claims. Much of this is no doubt opportunism, i.e. an attempt to recover some (any) loss by blaming defoliation. Some of it is no doubt a product of enemy propaganda, but a rather significant amount represents a belief that herbicides are responsible for the loss, whether imagined or real.[50]

Military personnel were required to investigate every claim, and when they determined that crop losses were not caused by defoliation, they engendered even further anger from farmers.

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[50] CORDS Pacification Studies Group. "Use of Herbicides," CORDS HWG, NARA RG 472.3, p. 9.

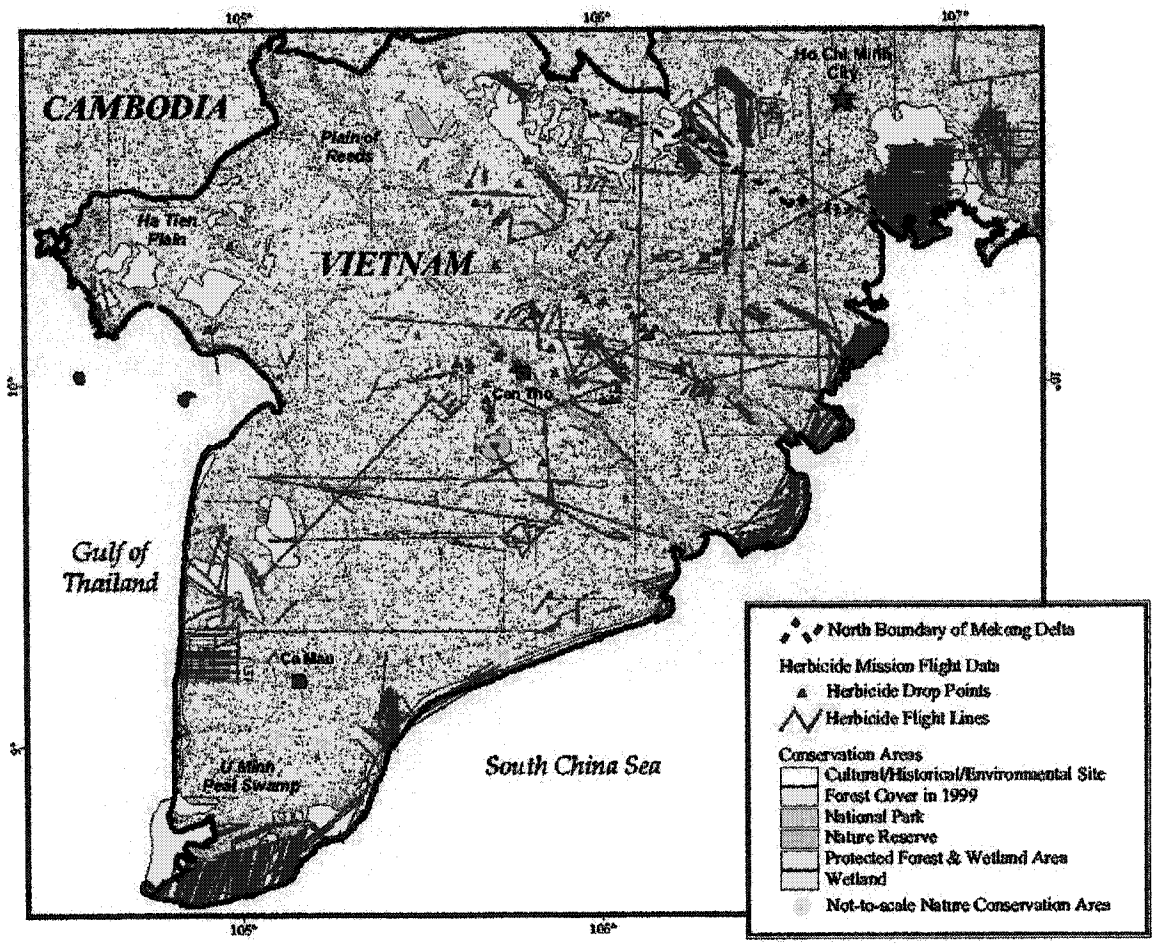


Figure 5.6: Hotspots of Agent Orange Use in the Mekong Delta. The map above details plots of all publicly documented flight paths and drops of herbicides in the Mekong Delta. What is immediately seen is that herbicides in the delta were typically applied in areas of the densest coastal mangroves and in some freshwater mangroves. As the 1970 report on herbicides concluded, in many cases just the reputation of chemical defoliants may have had widespread effects on antagonizing local people. Source: Tran Triet, Le Duc Minh, Mark Cheyne, Dorn Moore and Jeb Barzen. "Viet Nam, Herbicides and Wetlands: Locating the Hotspots," International Crane Foundation.
http://www.savingcranes.org/gis/fedprojects/Việt Namherbicide.htm

In the Mekong Delta, chemical defoliants were used mostly to clear away forest at river entrances and at NLF strongholds in the Cà Mau and U Minh areas (Figure 5.6) Primary sites of repeated spraying included the Cần Giờ forest east of Sài Gòn, and the U Minh and Nam Cận [Cà Mau] forests in Cà Mau. Longer red lines depict possible

errors in the flight log coordinates given the relatively short areas that single sprayings covered.[51]

When combined with more conventional artillery and aerial bombing, defoliation turned small patches of *"liberated"* terrain into "dead zones." Ông Dang lived south of a "strategic hamlet" near Vị Thanh and described how one such event occurred in the months after Tết in 1968:

> There were storks, herons, and cormorants here. Lots of cormorants. When you walked up here, you could see them making nests, and their offspring ... Sometimes the American soldiers went by, they shot and caught the storks, we couldn't prevent them. Then the storks started to go away towards Tết Mậu Thân (1968), and people also moved away...then the stork area disappeared.
>
> Where I was living, they shot down a jet from Vị Thanh, and in one day they dropped bombs nine times. Then they sent airplanes to scatter chemical agents where their plane was shot down. So my land had a lot of bomb holes around it like a *khọt* pan ... During the day in this village for the first time they sent the winged sprayers, the C-130's. They went up high, spraying down like fog, after that they carried it on planes and flew closer to us. My place was soaked by the airplane. If I'd been inside it I would have been soaked, too. After that when the poison dried, it looked like lime, just 3 days later, the trees dropped their leaves...I didn't see any effect out there in the field. However, the flowering plants were affected. For example, the cassava could die just from the poisonous air in the East. And cotton could die when poisons were scattered near it, even the poisonous air could kill it. Only *bình bát* trees [Annona glabra] could endure

[51] Dr. Trần Triết, personal correspondence, December 2001.

> the poisons, they withered and then grew up again. All other kinds of tree died...[52]

The political effects of defoliants spread to universities and newspapers in the United States and Europe. Banning defoliants became a *cause celebre* linking the anti-war movement with a budding environmental movement. On February 26, 1970, a professor of plant physiology at Yale proposed "a new international agreement to ban 'Ecocide'—the willful destruction of the environment."[53] He proposed that the military's use of defoliant chemical weapons to destroy entire ecosystems be designated as a crime equal to the "war crime of genocide, justly condemned at the Nuremberg trials that followed the Nazi era."[54] The first Earth Day protest occurred two months later at sites across the United States and was the largest mass protest event in American history.

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[52] Interview 6, Ông Dang, April 13, 2002, [435-497]. "Cò, Điệc , Còng Cọc..... Còng Cọc nhiều. Mình đi ở trên là thấy nó lót ổ, con nó lú đầu lền hết trơn ... Lúc có quốc gia lại nó cũng ngang nhiên đi bắn, bắt, mình đâu đám cản. Bắt đầu đi từ từ, thưa, lúc Mậu Thân ác liệt, dân đi rồi, mạnh ai nấy làm nên nó mới bị tiêu diệt luôn...Chỗ tui ở hồi đó nó bắn rớt 1 chiếc phản lực ở Vị Thanh, một ngày nó bỏ chín lần bom. Rồi nó đem máy bay rải chất độc hóa học, vì nó phát hiện ra chỗ đó bắn nó. Bởi vậy chỗ tui ở giờ lỗ bom, lỗ như khuôn bánh khọt ... Ban ngày, hồi đó nó rải ở xã này lần đầu tiên là loại cánh xéo, là C-130. Nó ở trên cao phun xuống thấy như mù sương bay ra, sau này nó để trên trực thăng đi sát mình. Chổ tui là bị trực thăng phun. Nó phun nếu mình ở trong đó là ướt mình luôn. Hồi nó phun ra nó ướt vậy thôi, chứ sau khô rồi trắng như vôi bột, 3 ngày sau cây cối rũ lá...Trồng lúa được vì nó rải theo trong vườn này không hà. Còn ở ngòai này thì lúa chưa thấy ảnh hưởng gì. Nhưng các loại hoa màu thì có loại bị ảnh hưởng. Ví dụ như cây mì, mặc dù nó rải ở Kinh Đông thiệt là xa nhưng hơi bay lên đây héo lá luôn. Còn hàng Bông thì bị rải gần, coi như bị tiêu diệt luôn. Tuy không trúng ngay cái điểm, nhưng hơi bay cũng bị tiêu diệt luôn. Chỉ có cây bình bát là chịu dựng được, nó rụi lá rồi mọc ra lại Ngòai ra những cây khác chết hết.

[53] Weisberg, *Ecocide in Indochina*, 4.

[54] Arthur W. Galston, "Plant Biology-Retrospect and Prospect," *Current Science* 80, No. 2 (25 January 2001), 151.

Desk Studies and the Mekong Committee: Isolated Blueprints for a Future Landscape

While war prevented most government attempts to engage major new works during the war, American support for Mekong basin-wide development through project surveys and "desk studies" resulted in fundamental changes in expert ideas about the hydraulic landscape. Often separated from actual construction by violence on the ground, the conceptual preparation of major new projects in irrigation, dams, canals, and other infrastructure during this period has since played an important foundational role in post-war efforts of the national government to undertake major infrastructure projects. Americans brought domestic experiences in the New Deal projects of the 1930's in the Tennessee Valley and institutions such as the Army Corps of Engineers to bear on development of the Mekong Basin in similar physical and political terms.

Peter White's December 1968 National Geographic travel diary, "The Mekong: River of Terror and Hope," conveys a sense of how the river played into American Cold War concerns in the 1960's:

> Counting Lao, Thai, Cambodians, and Vietnamese, the people of the Lower Mekong Basin add up to scarcely 28,000,000. But as I lived among these Southeast Asians, I could never forget how far their importance now exceeds their numbers...First, I saw it blazing most fiercely in South Viet Nam where the U.S. Navy's "miniature battleships," painted green and expressly for combat along the Mekong Delta waterways, pitted their rapid-fire cannon against the

> Viet Cong rockets made in the Soviet Union and in China...In short, the people of the Lower Mekong Basin found themselves enveloped by a struggle whose course might well determine the actions of Washington, Moscow, and Peking—and hence the fortunes of some 1,700,000,000 people—Americans, Russians, and Chinese, a third of mankind. Second, as hope kept rising for a settlement in Southeast Asia, the Lower Mekong Basin promised an unprecedented spectacle of peace: the Mekong Development Project...Altogether, the benefits envisioned would dwarf the achievements of the Tennessee Valley Authority. No area in the world ever planned such regional economic development on so massive a scale.[55]

The Mekong Development Project, including the Mekong Delta, was envisioned by White and many others as the direct, internationalized descendant of the TVA. Lyle W. Mabbott, a U.S. Bureau of Reclamation engineer who had worked on previous projects in Arizona and the Blue Nile, served as a Project Engineer for the proposed Pa Mong dam on the Mekong mainstream between Laos and Thailand. At Hole 108, the team drilled three-inch cores of sandstone then sent them to the U.S. for testing at a lab in Colorado. He guessed that Pa Mong might rise to 390 feet and hold two and a half times the water of Hoover Dam. The project would require more than a billion dollars and take 20 years to complete.[56]

Strategically, American interests in development of the Mekong were directly tied to the fall of Chiang Kai Shek's Kuomintang in 1949. After the war ended in 1945, the United States supported creation of the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far

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[55] Peter White. "The Mekong: River of Terror and Hope," *National Geographic* 134, No. 6 (December 1968), 744-745.

[56] Ibid., 754.

East (ECAFE) as an Asian form of the Marshall Plan intended to rapidly build infrastructure as a means of preventing the spread of Communism. The Communist victory in 1949 forced them to relocate the office to Bangkok, and thus the U.S. and their allies began looking at constructing projects in the river valley to create a political and physical bulwark against both China and the Soviet Union.[57] The old idea of the Mekong as a "river road to China" was replaced with the fear of it becoming a communist road into Southeast Asia.

In 1956, the US Bureau of Land Reclamation presented a 36-page report to ECAFE and riparian countries with recommendations for the basin's development, especially the need to collect data on hydrology, meteorology, hydrography, sedimentation, and geology.[58] These activities were aimed at understanding the watershed *as a whole*. A Committee for Co-ordination of Investigations of the Lower Mekong Basin was formed at its first meeting in Phnom Penh, October 31-November 1 1957. The Government of France donated 60 million francs (120,000 USD) to finance startup costs and preliminary surveys. A few weeks later, Lt. General R.A. Wheeler arrived in Bangkok to chair the United Nations Survey Mission that was charged by the Committee to make

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[57] UNESCAP, *History of UNESCAP*, http://www.unescap.org/unis/sub_unis/history_unescap.asp . Since 1974, UNESCAP has operated as a regional "thinktank" while the Mekong Commission has evolved into a separate office now located in Phnom Penh. Both China and the Soviet Union were members of ECAFE. The Soviet Union offered support for ECAFE activities in 1959, but this offer was rejected by Thailand and the Republic of Việt Nam.

[58] Mekong Committee. *The Mekong Committee: A Historical Account (1957-1989)*. Bangkok: Mekong River Commission (1990), p. 8.

preliminary field investigations and meet with members of four riparian nations (Cambodia, Thailand, Government of Việt Nam, and Laos).

Wheeler's leadership of the Committee led to the pre-eminence of the Army Corps in successive projects. He had served in the region as deputy commander of Allied bases. After 1945 he was Chief of the Army Corps of Engineers.[59] As Chief, he pushed for development of canals and waterways in central and southern Florida and convinced Congress to fund a $208m USD program that damaged wetlands in Everglades National Park.[60] Wheeler retired from his post afterwards and focused his studies on the Mekong Valley. His team surveyed three sites for mainstream dams (including Pa Mong) and recommended in a January 23, 1958 report a five-year plan for gathering data on the mainstream and tributaries for a total cost of 9.2 million USD. The Wheeler Mission also recommended that a "high level international advisory board of engineers of world-wide reputation" assist the Committee in the operation of this data-gathering program.[61]

By adopting the recommendations of General Wheeler, the Mekong Committee formulated a view of the river's development shaped by Army Corp experience

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[59] Department of Geosciences, Oregon State University. *Transboundary Freshwater Dispute Database: Mekong Project*, http://www.transboundarywaters.orst.edu/projects/casestudies/mekong.html.

[60] Secretary of the Army. *Comprehensive Report on Central and South Florida for Flood Control and Other Purposes*. United States GPO (1949), vi. Law School Library, University of Miami. *Everglades Restoration Collection*: http://www.law.miami.edu/library/everglades/secretary_army_letter.htm

[61] ECAFE, "Report of the Committee for Co-ordination of Investigations of the Lower Mekong Basin," Fourteenth Session, 5-15 March 1958, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Mekong Documentation Center, E/CN 11/475.

constructing mainstream dams and permanent structures in the United States. This adoption of Army Corps practices complemented the establishment of new international engineering firms such as France's SOGREAH that employed former colonial engineers such as Jammé. President Johnson continued to press for TVA-style projects as late as 1966 when he assigned David Lilienthal, principal architect of TVA, to head a joint commission with the Government of Việt Nam on the Mekong Delta.[62]

The result of these international alliances of engineers was a barrage of desk studies. Because many project areas in the Mekong Delta were inside or close to NLF zones, few surveyors and work crews actually visited the field. For the most part, teams of engineers and scientists were confined to air-conditioned offices in Sài Gòn or Bangkok and worked from old maps and newer aerial photos. While engineers did not typically venture into the countryside to consider the social or even the hydrological feasibility of many projects, their ideas of the landscape are important because of the formative role these projects had in establishing general government ideas about the delta's development in some future, post-war scenario. The fact that national governments in the Mekong Basin have recently adopted many of these 1960-era plans demonstrates the importance of these isolated desk study as imagined constructions of land and water that in recent times have become manifest.

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[62] Nguyen Thi Dieu, *The Mekong River and the Struggle for Indochina* (Westport CT: Praeger, 1999), 153.

As desk studies, these projects were also significant in that they often incorporated older colonial ideas of the hydraulic landscape. A Japanese engineering and construction firm, Nippon Koei [NK] (established 1946) returned to existing sites of pre-1945, abandoned French projects near Sóc Trang for the Ngân Rô and Tiếp Nhứt anti-salinity dams and moving gates. Because of its proximity to the sea, this region of approximately 50,000 hectares was seasonally inundated with saline water during the weaker river flows of the long dry season. French engineers first attempted to construct moving gates before 1945 that would allow freshwater to exit into the river in the rainy season and prevent salt water from entering the region in the dry season. Hostilities after 1945 led to damage and disrepair.[63]

After six years of study, in 1972 Nippon Koei successfully coordinated construction of one barrage. Security issues at Mỹ Thành and other sites forced Nippon Koei to focus on this one site. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development funded it as part of a "Tiếp Nhứt Pioneer Agricultural Project" that claimed to irrigate 50,000 hectares. After completion, researchers found that the barrage reduced salt intrusion but at the expense of tidally variations important to agriculture. Waterways inside the barrage stagnated while water outside the dikes and dam rose and fell with the tides.[64] A 1974 follow-up report noted that the project had stopped salt intrusion but stagnant

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[63] Nippon Koei Company, Ltd, "Design Report on Ngân Rô Barrage Project," October 1966, TTLTQG2, NL402.
[64] International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and Nippon Koei Company, Ltd, "Study Report on Tiếp Nhứt Pioneer Agricultural Project (United Nations Development Program Regional Project 253): Appendix 1974," TTLTQG2, NL430.

water inside the area prevented higher yields. The engineers were most impressed that local farmers were operating an estimated 1000 "máy Koler" to artificially drain and pump their fields.[65]

In 1968, a Korean subcontractor, Agricultural Development Corporation [ADC], began desk studies for another set of "pioneer irrigation areas" in the coastal region around Gò Công and Tân An. The 1968-1972 Mekong Committee Plan included the development of four large irrigation projects (one in each member country) and a long-range plan to the year 2000. The Gò Công Section was to be the first part of a long-range irrigation project that would eventually control more than 1 million hectares of land in the delta. The goal of this long-range project was to maximize use of available freshwater to high yields of rice. It estimated that 692.5 billion cubic meters of freshwater flowed through the delta annually, but it pointed out:

> "...the amount of water utilized is only 27 billion cubic meters per year—24 billion for agriculture and 3 billion for other purposes. The portion of water not utilized is simply allowed to flow into the sea."[66]

In order to conserve and use this volume of water, the project called for 94 kilometers of 3-meter-high dikes, two electric pumping stations lifting water from upstream into

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[65] Ibid., 77.

[66] ADC-Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, ROK, "Gò Công Water Control Project: General Report," June 1971, TTLTQG2, NL255, II.3.

gravity canals, 1,300 km of irrigation and drainage ditches, 58 km of feeder canals, a 16-meter-high Gò Công Dam for storing freshwater in the dry season, and a series of seawalls 300 meters inland from the shore.[67]

The projected cost was $56.3m USD (1970) and the projected "improvement" was an increase in rice production by 222,600 metric tons annually and 142,600 metric tons of vegetables and fruit. Curiously, the study found inland fisheries of "little importance" despite the importance of fish protein in local diets.[68] In a manner similar to Diệm's organization of the Cái Sắn Project, this one mentioned that 18,000 hectares had been "re-appropriated" through the Government's "Land to the Tiller Law" of May 26, 1970. Farmers in the region would participate in a Gò Công Land Improvement Association and district Farmers' Associations to maintain the local structures.[69]

What was most novel in this study was the concern for how upstream projects might affect downstream flows. The study noted, for example, that if $400m^3/s$ were subtracted from the low-flow of $2000m^3/s$ at Kratie, this would result in a movement of the boundary for tolerable salinity two kilometers further inland.[70] While construction on projects was prevented by war, national leaders and international consultants had begun

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[67] Ibid, VII.8.
[68] Ibid., IV.1.
[69] Ibid., VIII.3.
[70] Ibid., II.15.

by the late 1960's to consider hydrologic regimes more systematically from a broader, basin-wide perspective.

A new government concern for controlling hydrologic flow resulted in formation of a National Committee on Hydrology on July 12, 1966. Almost identical to Hydrological Committees being established in the other riparian nations, its purpose was to contribute to the development of consistent, basin-wide hydrologic data.[71] Compared with river valleys where quantitative knowledge of river flow extended back in historical records for tens or hundreds of years, information on the Mekong was fragmented and discontinuous.

While the creation of this Committee signified an important institutional focus on broader hydrologic trends, the events of the war prevented development of a comprehensive water inventory in the years following. Like the dredging efforts, this was due not only to violence in rural areas but also to incompatibilities and breaks in data. Different measuring stations published their data independently; the few colonial measuring stations on major rivers and waterways often belonged to different regional or departmental offices with different standards. There was no uniformity in datum, numerical systems, or naming conventions. Publication was often one to two years late and results were often confused by erroneous simplifications. There was not even a

single established datum for mean sea level. Given the incredible flatness of the delta, this presented serious obstacles in comparing water levels between different stations. Because of the time required to coordinate and publish past data, the newly funded office supported establishment of new stations with new equipment.[72]

Within this isolated world of international engineers and scientists developing ideas about the delta landscape, the events of the war in 1968 and the election of Nixon corresponded with a subtle but important shift in scientific attitudes towards river basin development. Nixon and his advisors opposed the New Deal approach of winning the peace through US-funded construction projects. A worsening military situation prevented such construction not only in the delta but also at sites upstream in Cambodia and Laos. "Desk studies" after 1968 focused almost exclusively on post-war scenarios. This was not an anticipation of RVN capitulation but part of Nixon's strategy to entice the DRV to negotiate for a peaceful settlement in return for massive commitments of US technical assistance to the north and the south once the war had ended. One of Johnson's former advisors on Southeast Asia, Eugene R. Black, formulated this policy of regional cooperation with a stronger role for Japan and the Asian Development Bank in post-war projects.[73]

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[71] Việt Nam Engineering and Construction Company, "Interim Proposal for Rehabilitation and Enlargement of the Hydrological Data Collection System: Republic of Việt Nam. Volume II," 1972, TTLTQG2, NL 499, 1.
[72] Ibid., 3.
[73] Nguyễn Thị Diệu, *The Mekong River*, 166.

The policy shifts resulting from changes in the American administration and events of the war coincided also with theoretical developments in the field of ecology that pertained to ideas about sustainable development in river basins. In an analysis of the Mekong River Basin, Richard L. Meier articulated the importance of achieving a "steady state" in which the human population did not exceed the Mekong's "carrying capacity" (estimated to be 123 million persons). He estimated that while such concepts were popular in Western planning projects since 1970, it was only in 1973 that researchers began "witnessing a worldwide change in perspective" that might affect plans for development of the Mekong.[74] Meier, a chemist who began his research in systems theory at the University of Michigan's Mental Health Research Institute (MHRI), published several influential books in the 1960's including *A Communicative Theory of Urban Growth* (1962) where he developed the idea of "wealth-producing cities".

His primary ecological observation on the Mekong was that technical improvements in agriculture and the creation of abundant power facilitated rapid urbanization. He advocated a "steady state" planning approach to balance the needs of these growing urban centers to the capacity of the watershed. Meier also articulated the idea that development projects and data gathering were essentially apolitical:

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[74] Richard L. Meier, "Human Ecology in Long Term River Basin Planning—The Mekong Case," *Working Paper No.*

> "The search for reasons that these ideas have not been expressed earlier has not revealed any interest group or dogma that has suppressed public discussion of this approach to valley development. There seems to be no basic conflict in values that needs to be worked out. The battles that have been going on in the region are about who shall govern, not about different ecological philosophies. If the facilities are designed properly it is the human population that benefits, and all the ideologies are willing to take the credit."[75]

This observation in 1974 was perhaps a form of wishful thinking, but the assumption that there were no differing ecological philosophies in the war is interesting. Maier and other researchers recognized that the NLF and the PAVN possessed their own constructive agendas in the delta.

Maier supported the idea that economic prosperity would only come through the "formation and continued survival of large urban settlements," regardless of who controlled them.[76] Planning then could be free to focus on the methods of urban and ecological design without suffering the limits of ideology.

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239 (Berkeley CA: UC-Berkeley Institute of Urban and Regional Development, 1974), 18.

[75] Ibid., 18.

[76] Ibid., 2.

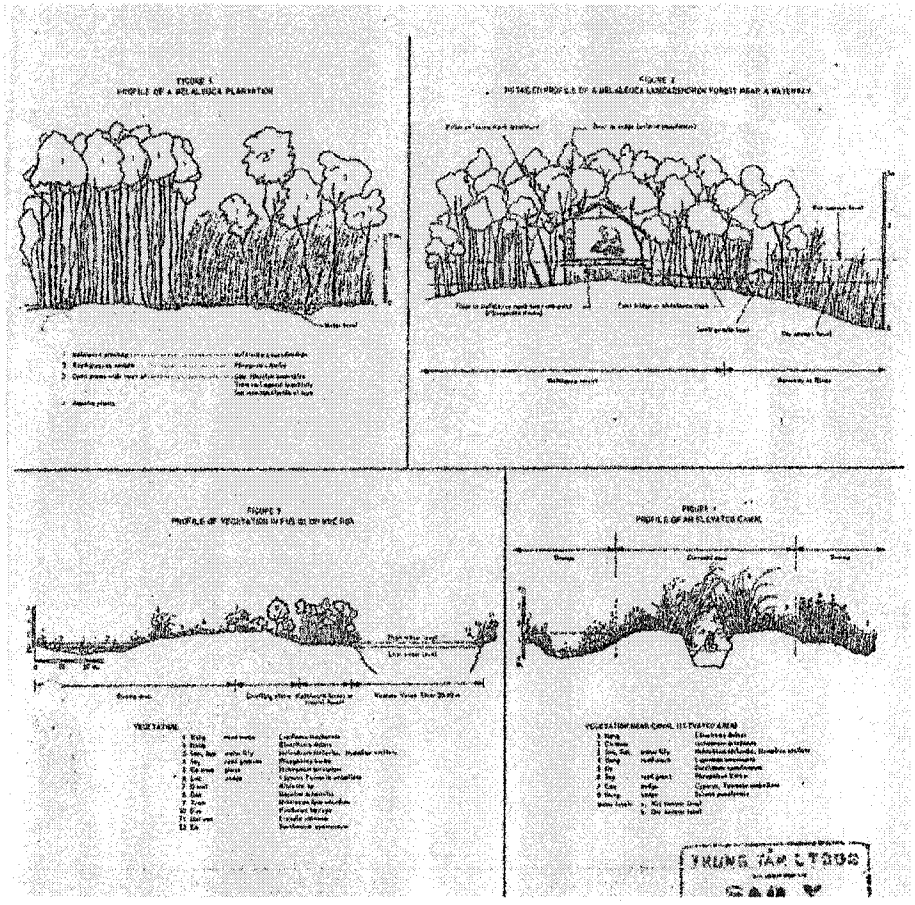


Figure 5.7: Plant Transect Illustrations for the Plain of Reeds – 1968. The above illustrations are included in a major ARPA study on the ecology and landscape of the Plain of Reeds in 1968. These transects represent one of the first attempts by outside scientists to understand the Plain of Reeds from a different spatial perspective. Instead of connecting waterways in a 2-dimensional plain, these drawings were attempts to understand and represent the Plain of Reeds as a more heterogenous landscape composed of many different sub-types of plan communities including stands of malaleuca on higher soils and stands of the reed *sậy* that provided high enough cover to disguise a small boat. Source: Robert L. Thomson. Chief, Engineer Agency for Resources Inventories, Department of the Army to Project Officer, "Plain of Reeds Project. ARPA Order No. 1068," July 1968, TTLTQG2, NL 4730, Plate VI, p. 54.

One site for post-hostility planning was the Plain of Reeds. In July 1968, the Army's Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) prepared one of the most detailed ecological summaries of all known materials on the Plain of Reeds. Chief Engineer Robert Thomson wrote of the study:

> "We feel that immediate implementation of comprehensive long-range planning for water control in the Mekong Delta constitutes the number one piority for optimizing post-hostility economic growth and political stability in Viet-Nam. Such planning, incorporating field investigations, should commence during the period of insurgency so that implementation can begin as an impact program at the time of phase down for military operations. This Plain of Reeds study constitutes a first step toward development of such an approach."[77]

Unlike previous surveys, the ARPA report represented a more multi-faceted survey of the region, including listings of predominant vegetation communities and drawings of different terrain cross-sections (Figure 5.7). Unlike past reports that considered only the physical topography and the location of waterways, this study considered a larger range of factors including mapping of grasses and different vegetation types as well as identification of key flora and fauna. Data came mostly from existing reports and maps rather than extensive field studies. While the conclusions of the report did not differ too much from earlier proposals to construct flood dikes or larger canals, what is most interesting about this report is that it was the first to include some form of systematic representation of flora and fauna in the landscape. The interiors of Đồng Tháp were no longer simply blank spaces of wasteland but appeared instead as classes and types of landscape composed of various key species.[78]

The last series of Mekong Committee "desk studies" were conducted for the most part in Bangkok. The Netherlands Government funded the Delta Development Team to

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[77] Ibid.

[78] Robert L. Thomson, Chief, Engineer Agency for Resources Inventories, Department of the Army to Project Officer, "Plain of Reeds Project. ARPA Order No. 1068," July 1968, TTLTQG2, NL 4730, Plate XII.

comb existing maps and reports and make general observations and recommendations on agricultural development. The Netherlands Team wrote one of the first studies of the Mekong Delta as a transnational hydraulic region including more than 1 million hectares of territory in Cambodia to the Tonle Sap (Great Lake). They recognized the importance of cross-boundary and social issues in future projects. They also identified local beliefs that were important in shaping how well farmers adapted new technologies:

> "While the social-psychological characteristics of Vietnamese farmers in the delta may represent an obstacle for agricultural development where an appeal must be made for the farmers' mutual cooperation, on the other hand, the Vietnamese farmers are very responsive to innovations...Farm operations in the Khmer part of the delta involve simple technology passed on from former generations, and the farmers are generally reluctant to change their production techniques...recent developments, such as a significant increase in education, might alter greatly the stagnant peasant society."[79]

Unlike engineers who for generations had proposed land improvement projects in the "abandoned lands," The Netherlands Team shifted their focus to areas that were already productive. They proposed to start water control projects in areas between and along the main river branches, alluvial terraces and low-acidity soils.[80] The Team revived arguments made by agricultural engineers as early as the 1930's who favored agricultural intensification over agricultural expansion.

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[79] Netherlands Delta Development Team. *Recommendations Concerning Agricultural Development with Improved Water Control in the Mekong Delta: Main Report* (Bankok: Mekong Committee, 1974), 5.

[80] Ibid., 9.

The Netherlands Team also created one of the first comprehensive hydrologic models of the entire delta region. Mr. A.D. van der Boon spent one year from August 1972 to August 1973 corroborating recently-gathered hydrologic data with site visits. Because security was more unstable in Cambodia, the Team extrapolated data from archival resources.[81] These efforts in the Mekong Delta to integrate diverse types of "data" and to consider development alternatives from a mixture of technical and social considerations established one of the first project studies not politically aligned with any single government since fighting began in 1945. Recognition that some regions were inherently ill-suited to rice because of their hydrology and soil was a major departure from the strain of technological positivism that supported so many past dredging and irrigation schemes.

Conclusion

The American War was one of the most destructive wars waged anywhere on Earth in recent history both in terms of the human and the environmental costs. While histories of the war generally describe the events of the Revolution or in American experiences what David Halberstam has described as a "quagmire," understanding the wartime past in terms of water and landscape is more complex. Amidst the violence of combat and its fracturing of an infrastructure of canals and roads as well as human lives, farmers as

well as engineers engaged in numerous efforts to reconstruct and develop water projects either at a very local scale or on paper. These efforts today now play an important formative role in shaping the terms of irrigation as well as recent government activities to construct new projects with international support.

In regions outside the enforcement of strategic hamlets—where jets and artillery shells frequently passed—farmers acquired and maintained small diesel engines for powering their boats and for managing water in fields. The aggregated impact of these individual diesel engines operating in hundreds of thousands of locations simultaneously cannot be overstated. In the author's discussions with farmers, all of them shared stories about how the use of the motors was a material revolution in their lives. They traveled longer distances, converted difficult soils into productive paddy and orchard, powered electric generators, and protected fields from floods. The engines moved across political boundaries and were important to civilian and military actions alike. They also permitted increasing harvests from a single seasonal crop to multiple crops per year.

Strategic hamlets and "agrovilles" such as Vị Thanh were not only fortified, concentrated settlements that disrupted and relocated farmers; they were also important as centers for commerce and exchange. RVN and NLF allies purchased machines in these centers and then employed them strategically. As physical constructions of road

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[81] Ibid., 15.

and canal, the "agrovilles" are especially interesting as early attempts to create urban-like settlements in rural areas. Had these towns been built during peacetime and without forcing farmers to move, they might have become what Maier imagined as the large urban settlements that would help people manage their resource use more sustainably. The growth of Vị Thanh and other former "agrovilles" since 1975 suggests that the idea of urbanizing the Mekong delta was attractive to all sides.

Finally, this period is extreme both in the scale of destruction and in the scale of proposed construction envisioned in so many surveys for post-war projects. Americans and international consultants supported creation of the Mekong Development Commission in 1957 as one of the largest ever attempts to transform the lower basin with a series of dams, extensive dikes, and expansive irrigation projects. The events of the war on the ground prevented engineers and foreign consultants from spending much time at proposed project sites; nevertheless these fragmented ideas of the hydraulic landscape shaped general government attitudes towards future projects.

CONCLUSION

With Việt Nam's "renovation" (*đổi mới*) reforms in 1986 opened the country to foreign tourists, today over a million each year find themselves on buses and boats visiting floating markets, fruit orchards and farms on short itineraries into the delta. During my stay in Việt Nam, I was not only able to travel but also to interview farmers, study documents of the past Sài Gòn governments, and visit many sites described in those documents. Farmers sometimes joked with me that I appeared to them as a ghost of Americans from eras past. When hearing their stories or passing by a war memorial along the side of the highway, I often felt a sense of historical *deja vu*. I thought the same question that many tourists ask when traveling here: "how can they forget what we did here?"

While I quickly found that no one had forgotten these experiences, remembering them and interpreting them was complicated; this project addressed the same issues in remembering and interpreting the local past in the Mekong Delta. First, the way such a question is posed by American tourists reflects an American-centered approach that still dominates most of the English-language literature on the war. In a more local or Vietnamese understanding of the past, Americans were not central characters. This difference between American and Vietnamese perspectives often leads to representations of Vietnamese characters as transparent allies or enemies in American

works, or in revolutionary narratives, Americans get cast in two-dimensional terms as "foreign invaders" with their Vietnamese allies as "lackeys".

American involvement was more complex. They located their civilian and military projects in a political and a physical landscape that was already well-defined from past projects, social and environmental problems, and an organized alternative state vision articulated by such groups as the Việt Minh and the NLF. American attempts to reproduce New Deal programs such as the TVA in the Mekong Delta were often transformed by Vietnamese officials who shaped foreign aid to meet their own ideas about development. Reports by Americans such as Wolf Ladejinsky, who traveled through Việt Nam during the first years of "nation-building," reveal frustration and a growing split between American aid representatives and Vietnamese officials over land reform.[1] American-RVN involvement in such programs as the Agricultural Development Centers or later projects often ended in retractions of funding, private accusations of corruption, and widening gaps between Diệm's government and the USOM.

As an exploration of Vietnamese experiences in the Mekong Delta, this project continues a recent trend in examining issues of Vietnamese national identity in the local environment. Present-day images of the Mekong Delta fitting neatly into the familiar s-

[1] Wolf Ladejinsky, July 16, 1955. "South Vietnam Revisited." RG 469: USOM Vietnam: Classified Subject Files. NARA II, RG 469 250/82/33/03/01, 48.

curve of the Vietnamese national map recall Thongchai Winachakul's discussion of the "geobody" as a powerful tool for re-interpreting the local past within a national framework.[2] This projects shows that the process of "nationalizing space" began decades before French colonial rule with major projects, inscriptions and regional histories in the 1820's. Writers such as Trịnh Hoài Đức engaged in acts of translation, converting a chaotic waterway frontier into a system of rivers, mountains and towns. Such histories as *Gia Định Thành Thông Chí* and later technologies such as the *địa bộ* were important instruments for expansions of Vietnamese governance into the delta frontiers. Such extensions also played an important role in guiding subsequent colonial exploration and government.

The range of documents now available from post-1954 sources also opens up new questions about the role of the RVN with respect to American intervention and local events. RVN officials and engineers often found themselves mediating between local Vietnamese interests and those of foreign advisors. They operated the dredges and wrote reports back to their bosses complaining about the actual conditions of dredging and land reclamation at project sites. Such intermediaries offer a glimpse into the actual workings of early campaigns to win the "hearts and minds" of people in rural areas. Vietnamese engineers were instrumental in carrying forward older colonial debates

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[2] Thongchai Winichakul. *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation.* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press (1994), 164.

about land use into the 1950's. Many had trained with the French and carried these ideas forth into new American-funded projects.

The use of oral histories and revolutionary memoirs also re-examines the role of Revolutionaries in the recent past. It shows that the rhetorical binary of "pacification" and "scorched earth" distracts attention away from the very constructive ways that Revolutionaries manipulated the "undoing" forces of nature to build a different kind of landscape more favorable to their own strategic ends. Destroying bridges, roads and canals not only destroyed an infrastructure of control but also extended a landscape of liberation. In "liberated" zones, farmers grew the longer stem floating rice as a means of coping with more extensive flooding; the physical surfaces of the terrain—both cultivated and wild—changed during the course of the war.

The location of "liberated" areas also reflects much deeper local social and environmental relationships. In the Mekong Delta, the Revolution grew out of the abandoned "empty spaces" of lands that had fallen under the control of a few powerful landowners. These spaces were "empty" from the perspective of colonial engineers and post-colonial planners, but locally they were often sites for intense dislocation and dispossession of traditional inhabitants. They were also "empty" in the sense that these areas were not economically productive within the colonial plantation economy. The colonial dredging effort had caused a wholesale conversion of land through hydrologic change, forest fires, and legal dispossession of those who had already cleared land and

established villages. By the 1930's, these combined ecological and social problems formed what colonial administrators saw as an "agricultural crisis." While colonial officials and subsequent governments attempted radical new *casier* projects to solve the crisis, local "unravelings" of colonial public works and social protections fostered the development of alternative state visions articulated by ICP members in the 1930's, the Việt Minh in the 1940's, and the NLF in the 1960's. When Americans and RVN officials met with tenant farmers in the mid-1950's, what they failed to address was the extent that the Revolution had been built out of the ongoing social and environmental problems attributed to colonial rule. Farmers clearly stated to visitors such as Ladejinsky that the RVN government could develop a more substantial base of support in rural areas if it only did what the Việt Minh had done: redistribute land from the large plantations and reduce taxes. RVN officials, however, refused to approve such measures at the time because of the broader Cold War emphasis on respecting private property ownership while the DRVN, the Soviet Union and China engaged in collectivization and land redistribution.

By focusing on the water environment in the Mekong Delta and its relationship to history, this project also extends the predominantly American perspectives of environmental history to a uniquely non-Western yet Western-influenced place. The *casiers* and subsequent land development programs in the Mekong Delta suggest that Vietnam was an important "laboratory" both for early French environmental researchers

and subsequently Americans interested in issues of development and rural poverty in Asia and Africa. Historian Richard Grove shows how late 19th century American and European concerns about the preservation of nature and even climate change were derived from observations and conversations in colonial Asia and Africa. I suggest that a similar condition is true with regard to recent campaigns for "sustainable development" and the modern environmental movement. The observations of human geographers during the agricultural crises of the 1930's brought about wider debates in Europe and North America about the social and political dimensions of soil degradation and rural poverty. The "abandoned lands" of the Mekong Delta served as important laboratories in the 1950's where American advisors funded Vietnamese programs to resettle thousands of refugees to reclaim the growing areas of "wasteland." Even the American environmental movement of the 1970's was partly rooted in the events of the "American War," especially public outcry over the use of chemical defoliants known generally as "Agent Orange".

Studies in Vietnamese and Asian environmental history may also show many parallels between events on a more global scale. For example, the "agricultural crisis" in the Mekong Delta can be seen as a local collapse of hydraulic nature and colonial governance; but it can also be seen in terms of a much broader agricultural collapse happening more globally in such regions as the Central Plains of the United States, irrigated plains of India, Sudanese cotton fields, and other regions. The difficulty in

making such global environmental analyses is that they may tend to replicate the global thinking of late-colonial planners at the time—seeing rural poverty and political instability as the same problem spread across many different locales. This generalizing view of poverty and environmental degradation was a foundation of Cold War rhetoric that cast the world into a binary battleground where the war against Communism was to be waged in farmlands, factories and slums. Such global visions prevented Americans and others from responding to the local details of corruption, ecological imbalances, and existing landscape features.

Returning to the question of the high modernist state that Scott describes in *Seeing Like a State*, the resulting view of such a state in colonial Cochinchina and the Diệm regime was fragmented by multiple visions. The ideas of rural elites, entrepreneurs, contractors, foreign advisors, and officials were in constant flux with changing global events from the 1930's to the 1970's. These "constructive alliances" shifted with changing economic conditions, foreign aid, the military situation and political events. The French colonial government, the American establishment in Sài Gòn, or the RVN were not monolithic institutions. Furthermore, the debates that often erupted between engineers and others "inside" the state often supported significant political shifts within the state. The kinds of social and environmental critiques of colonialism that surfaced publicly in the 1960's can be traced to some of these earlier debates in colonial and Cold War projects in such places as the Mekong Delta. Some such as French

agronomist René Dumont were shocked by what they observed in their visits to rural areas; Dumont left Indochina and returned to France where he worked for thirty years to denounce the social and political problems inherent in agricultural failures witnessed abroad. Dumont, who ran unsuccessfully for President in 1974, is considered as a forefather of political ecology and the Green Party in France.

By bringing both local perspectives into play with the published reports of Vietnamese, French and American sources, this thesis also raises a question about different interpretations of nature that extend beyond "seeing like a state" to different cultural and intellectual bases for "seeing nature." 19th-century Vietnamese sources such as *Writings on Gia Định* present a view of the local landscape shaped largely in reference to classical Chinese ideas in literature, adoptions of core ideas in *feng shui*, and even classical modes of describing water projects through steles and other inscriptions. Such sources marginalize the many ways that local Vietnamese settlers blended their views on the local landscape and nature with existing Chinese, Khmer and Cham ideas and technologies. Rather than adopt this literary understanding of local attitudes towards water, the rivers, and local plants, it is worthwhile to consider the common practices of cultural adaptation and borrowing that historian Tony Reid suggests form a common Southeast Asian "human unit", especially in maritime and coastal regions of Southeast Asia.[3] This idea presents a useful foil against nationalist constructions of local identity,

[3] Tony Reid. *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450-1680. Volume One: The Lands Below the Winds.* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 1988), 5.

but it ultimately leaves the boundaries between local, regional and national identity unresolved. These fuzzy boundaries illustrate an important tension between local and state history.[4] By considering the events and environmental factors connected to specific projects such as Xà No Canal or the *Casier Tonkinoise*, this thesis supports the idea that local events in the hydraulic landscape often influenced broader events in the colonial and post-colonial state. Such an analysis opens up new narrative spaces not only for local actors such as farmers but also for nature and the water landscape in Vietnamese and Southeast Asian history.

This history of water projects shows that environmental problems such as flooding, crop loss, soil degradation, and drought combined natural and social dimensions with local and global consequences. The rivers and tides of the Mekong Delta played into both local and state efforts to integrate the Mekong Delta into different visions of state. The resulting view of history in such a region is more hydraulic, not born of a single origin, but instead located among the shifting forces of national and local ideas in the metaphorical river of time.

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[4] Keith Taylor calls this a "surface orientation" and notes the importance of this dialogue between local and national actors as a means of making national histories less teleological. Keith Taylor, "Surface Orientations in Vietnam: Beyond Histories of Nation and Region," *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 57 No. 4 (Nov. 1998), 949-978.

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APPENDIX A: ORAL HISTORIES

The following ten interviews were conducted as a local component of research for this project. My primary goal was to understand in a localized context how events of historic significance affected specific ecological conditions and individuals. I chose my study area and interviewees with assistance from colleagues in the Department of Environment and Natural Resources Management at Cần Thơ University and cooperation from the Environment, Science and Technology Offices of Vị Thanh and Phụng Hiệp Districts, Hậu Giang Province. Members of these offices introduced me to officials in ten commune People's Committees who then served as liaisons for me with individual farmers. I asked them to introduce me to farmers who were natives of the village, who were over 65 years old, and who had a good understanding of the local environmental history. Full names of each respondent have been removed from the transcripts to respect privacy; each respondent is referred to by first name only.[1]

The format for the interview was conversational with a small set of basic questions. These questions centered around historic changes to soil, water, biota, and settlement. They then moved to questions of land use and land tenure. In some interviews, the

[1] In the Mekong Delta, many people are known by a combination of their given name and a number designating their order of birth in the family. For example, Mr. Long who was the sixth child in his family is called "Mr. Seven Long" (Ông Bảy Long) or even just "Mr. Seven" (Ông Bảy). Children never take the name "One" because of traditional concerns about the safety of first-borns; parents name the first child "Two."

respondents clarified historical details about major landscape features in the area such as plantations, strategic hamlets, abandoned lands, and NLF bases.

Each interview was taped using a stereo tape cassette recorder. Each cassette was then copied into digital audio on compact discs. My colleague, Lê Thị Huyền, and her father transcribed the audio recordings into Vietnamese. The Vietnamese transcriptions are abridged in areas where respondents paused, asked for clarification, or were interrupted by other persons in the room. The term "Int." refers to myself as the interviewer in the transcripts except where my assistant from CTU, Mr. Hiếu, asked additional questions. English interpretations follow each section in Vietnamese and are also provided courtesy of Lê Thị Huyền. All transcripts below include Vietnamese followed by English translations. Each section is noted by a meter number from the original tape cassette.

Figure 6.1 indicates the approximate location of the study area and Figure 6.2 indicates approximate location of each interview site and some surrounding features. The area was chosen based on its location among several historic waterways: Cai Lớn River, Lai Hiếu Canal (1906), Saintenoy Canal (1898), and Xà No Canal (1904). Sites discussed in the interviews are indicated on Figure 6.2 including the Gressier Plantation, Labaste Plantation, Vị Thanh and Hoa Lưu Agrovilles, and the Phương Bình NLF Base. The

study area was also chosen because CTU has an ecological research station located in the center of this area at Hoà An.

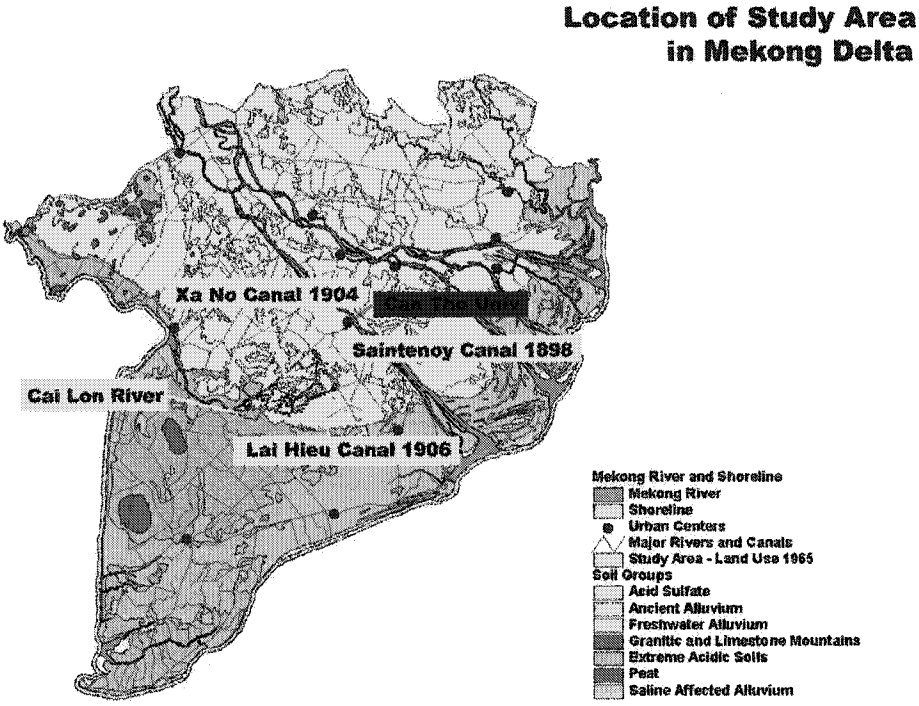


Figure 6.1: Location of Study Area: The figure above shows the location of the major water features bounding this area of approximately 2000 square kilometers. The underlying map shows major soil categories and the location of towns and cities in the Mekong Delta. Cần Thơ University is located in Cần Thơ City about 40 km from its research station located approximately in the center of the study area. Source: Author.

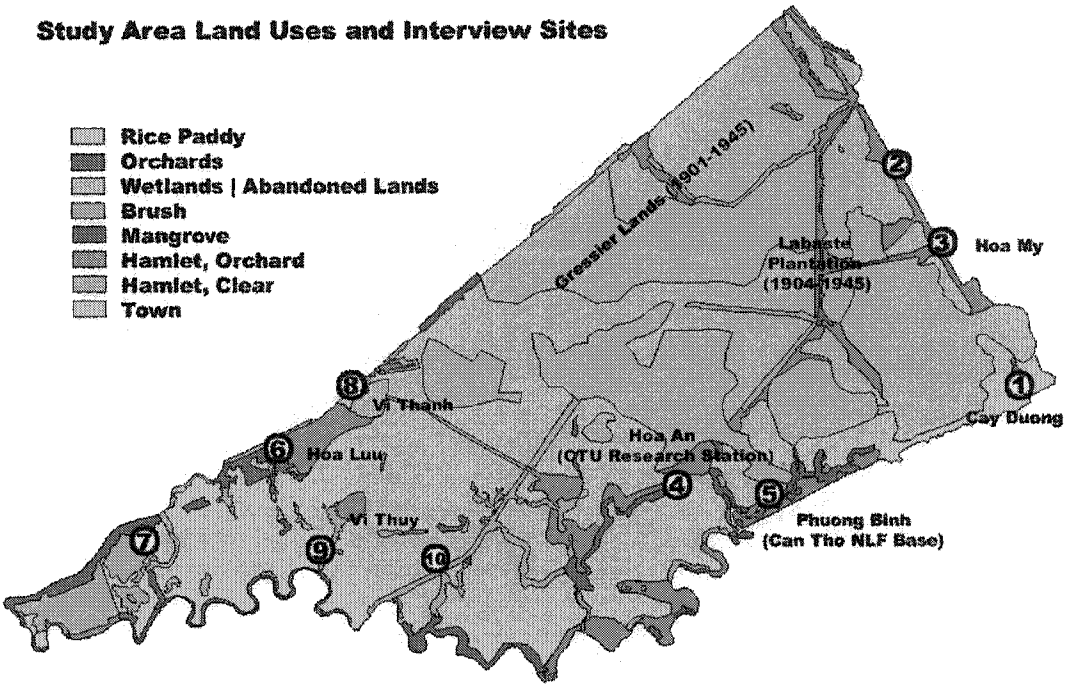


Figure 6.2 Interview Sites and Land Cover: The above figure shows approximate land cover for the study area with locations of the interviews indicated in the yellow circles. Source: Author.

Phỏng Vấn 1
Ông Mười
April 12 2002
Cây Dương Town
Phụng Hiệp District

[000]

Tôi tên --- --- Xang...sinh tại dây..năm 1923. Ông già bà già ở đây từ năm 1901...hơn 100 năm. [Trong thời đó] Người dịa phương lập ấp. Pháp vô mới đào kinh từ [xã] Một Ngàn ở trên Bà Đầm Thác Lác đó, đi thăng xuống dưới Tân Lập, đặt cái tên nó là Saintenoy-Bassac...vì cái hậu của sông Bassac...ngoài kia là sông Bassac...ở trong này múc con kinh này, bắt lao động đào, chứ không có máy móc gì hết.

My name is --- --- Xang....I was born here...in 1923. My parents came here in 1901...more than 100 years ago [At that time] people established the village The French came, and they dug a new canal from Một Ngàn by Bà Dầm Thác Lác there, going straight down to Tân Lập, calling it Saintenoy-Bassac.

[Clarification: Saintenoy refers to a canal dug in 1896 to connect the water-rich creeks around Can Tho with the water-poor area around Soc Trang. It was named after the provincial administrateur of Can Tho at that time. Saintenoy-Bassac refers to the segment of the Lai Hieu Canal that connected the Saintenoy Canal with the Bassac or Hau Giang (Mekong) River.]

Int: Kinh Saintenoy là từ Bassac tới đây hay là từ Rạch Gòi xuống?
Int: Saintenoy Canal was from the Bassac to here or from Rạch Go?i

Saintenoy là từ Một Ngan xuống tới Tân Lập. Từ Sông Hậu xuống đây là Saintenoy-Bassac. Cái hậu của sông Bassac (sông Hậu này), thì ở đây là sông Saintenoy-Bassac, nghĩa là cái kinh hậu của sông Bassac...Pháp nó đặt cái tên "Bassac", Mêkông đó. Saintenoy-Bassac từ Bà đầm Thác Lác xuống Tân Lập, dài lắm, xa lắm...

Saintenoy went from Mot Ngan down to Tan Lap. From the Hau Giang River down to here was the Saintenoy-Bassac. Bassac meant the back of Bassac River (Hau River today), so to here was called Saintenoy-Bassac, it means the back canal from the Bassac River...The French guys gave it the name "Bassac", the Mekong. Saintenoy-Bassac ran from Ba Dam Thac Lac to Tan Lap, very long, very far.

Int: Khi nào đào Kinh Xáng Lái Hiếu?
Int: When did they dig Lai Hieu Canal?

Nó múc kinh Lái Hiếu năm 1906...Năm đó Pháp vộ..dầm không, rừng không mà ... rừng tràm...sau khi Pháp vô thì nó làm...thành ra Lái Hiếu sau Kinh Bún Tàu nữa...

They dredged Lai Hieu in 1906...In that year, the French came...swamp everywhere, dense forest...cajeput forest...after the French came and they started work...therefore [we have] Lai Hieu Canal, after Bun Tau Canal.

[038]

Int: Thời cha mẹ Ông, chỗ nào là rừng tràm?
Int: In the time of your parents, in what areas was there cajeput forest?

Rừng tràm hết trơn, đây là đường tượng dị Thành ra Ông Bà minh khai ấp này..vừa khai mở đường đưa dân cư về đây Khi khai kinh này, có dân tứ xứ, tha phương cầu thực, đến cùng khai hoang lập ấp...thành ra mới có dân cư, dần dần mới đông, lập làng lập xóm...

There was cajuput forest everywhere, this road [outside here] was a road made by elephants. Because of that, our ancestors came here to clear the land and found the village...by clearing a road, they could bring settlers here. When they dug this canal [Lai Hieu], people came from every direction, they could go anywhere and settle; so they could come here and create a village here...so that instantly [after work on the canal] there were settlers, steadily getting more crowded, establishing villages and hamlets.

Int: Ở đây, ngày xưa ngoài tràm còn có gừa, sạo..và một số cây to nổi tiếng khác?
Int: Besides cajeput trees, were there gừa, sạo..and any other kinds of large and well-known local trees?

Không. Chỉ có một số cây tạp. Cây tràm là tốt nhất. Vùng này là vùng nước ngọt, vùng tràm không hà.

No. Just some mixed scrub trees. Cajeput was the best. This region was a fresh water region, mostly just cajeput.
Int: Hồi xưa, rừng tràm to không, [thân cây không thẳng, cong và] ngoằn ngoèo, phải không?
Int: In the past, was the cajeput forest made up of large trees, [trunks that were not straight but round] and twisted?

Ư, cây bự, giống như bây giờ ở rừng Kiên Giang dang bị cháy..[tháng 4 2002] là cháy ba bốn ngàn hecta.

Yeah, big ones, same as today in the [U Minh] forest at Kiên Giang thats burning...[April 2002] three to four thousand hectares are on fire…

[066] :

[về địa chủ]
[regarding landlords]

Thầy Kho (ở Kinh Xáng Xà No), Labaste này, chỗ này [ở Cây Dương] là Quan Paul, (mép bên chỗ Xã bây giờ là) Thừa Biện Tài là dân Tây…

Master Kho [landlords were frequently called by the prenoun Thầy which means teacher, or master], Labaste here, and this area [Cây Dương] was Quan Paul, (on the Peoplés Committee side [of the canal] was) Thừa Biện Tài, a French national.

[074]

Họ làm ăn không khá, bán lại cho địa chủ Hàm Tài (Nguyễn Phước Tài). Lê Thị Trinh vẫn còn ...có chồng Tây, rể của Quan Paul, khai khu vực.

They didn't do so well, and they sold the land to the landlord Hàm Tài (Nguyễn Phước Tài). Ms. Lê Thị Trinh was also here...she had a French husband, an in-law of Quan Paul, settled in this area.

[080]

Hội Tề, Hương Chức của xã có điền manh, một người có 30, 50, 70, 100, 200 công...nhưng số đó ít. Có một số hội tề, địa chủ nho nhỏ…

Hội Tề and Hương Chức [ceremonial and representative village leaders during colonial rule] of the village had good land, one person having 30, 50, 70, 100, even 200 công ... [1 công = 1/10th of a hectare] but they were few. There were a number of village headmen and small landlords...

[085]

Int: Thời cha mẹ Ông lập dất, vùng này là nước ngọt?
Int: In the time your parents established the farm, was this area a freshwater regime?

Đất này nước ngọt. Có chỗ có phèn: phèn chua, phèn vàng, phèn xanh, phèn trắng. Xanh còn đỡ, trắng không sử dụng được...Chỉ có phèn vàng làm ăn được...

The land here was fresh-water. There were places with alum [phèn]: sour alum, gold alum, green alum, and white alum. The green was less severe, the white you couldn't use...only gold alum [FeSO2 acid sulfate or pyrite] was usable for crops.

[108]

Int: Các loại cây nào thích hợp với từng loại phèn?
Int: What kinds of plants agreed with what kinds of alum?

Phèn xanh, trắng: trồng cây khóm, tràm...đưng...sậy.., năng nhỏ...không làm ruộng được.

Green and white alum: could only be tolerated by pineapples, cajeput...reeds...eleocharis...you couldn't create fields in it.

[116]

Int: Trong vùng Saintenoy có lung to không?
Int: In this Saintenoy area were there any large oxbow swamps?

Có nhiều lung...Bàu Sấu có [lung], Bàu Cá Bông có [lung]...[cỏ] sậy, lát, năng [mọc] lên, cá, lươn sinh sản ... đào ao để bắt cá ... cá lóc bự lắm!

There were many oxbow swamps ... Bàu Sấu [Crocodile Swamp], Bàu Cá Bông [Catfish Swamp]...reeds, grasses, very productive for fish and eels...you could dig ponds to catch fish...the catfish were giant!

[130]

Int: Thời đó so sánh với hiện nay
Int: How did that time compare with now?

Ngày xưa ruộng , nếu đất nào nhẹ phèn (gò), trong cái lung...

In the past, the land was low in alum, in the oxbow areas...

[153]

Xưa gặt bằng tay
In the past, we harvested by hand.

[160]

Giống Lúa: Móng Chim Vàng, Móng Chim Trắng thời xưa...thay đổi nhiều lắm...cả trăm thứ giống.
Rice varieties: Golden Bird Claw, White Bird Claw in the past...its changed a lot...hundreds of varieties.

[166]

Thời xưa nghèo, không dủ đong lúa ruộng cho địa chủ, trả hoài không hết, rồi bỏ trốn.
In the past we were poor, not enough to pay the landlord in rice...you'd keep paying but never finish, so you'd have to try and escape.

[171]

Int: Địa chủ nào? Labaste hay điền Tây?
Int: Which landlord? Labaste or other French landlords?

Điền Tây cũng có, địa chủ Việt cũng có: Hàm Tài, Năm Của.

There were French, Vietnamese also: Hàm Tài, Năm Của

Int: Một hecta bằng bao nhiêu giạ hồi xưả
Int: One hectare produced about how many giạ in the past?

Nếu trúng thì bốn [chục dến] năm chục giạ, cỡ 1000kg. Nếu thất, thì 1 công 1 giạ, giạ rưỡi, phải lắt, không gặt, không cắt được.

If the harvest was good, it produced from 40 to 50 giạ , approximately 1000 kg. If it was bad, then one công [1/10th hectare] produced 1 or 1.5 giạ [10-15 giạ per hectare], we had to pick it up by hand, not harvest with sickle...we couldn't cut it.

[183]

(Hiếu) Int:Thay đổi giống năm nào?
(Hiếu) Int: In what year did they switch rice varieties?

Lúc đó có thay đổi, nhưng không giống bây giờ: Cách Mạng thành công, Nhà nước tập trung vào xây dựng, hướng dẫn toàn dân đi vô kỹ thuật, làm thủy lợi nội đồng., xổ phèn, xổ nước. Làm hai vụ, ba vụ. Đổi giống liên tục. Nghiên cứu bên ngoài, bên trong...Từ khi giai phóng 1976 tới giờ, đổi 200,300 loại giống rồi...nếu có loại giống nào xài một hai năm mà nó thoái hoá, nhà nước hướng dẫn bỏ giống đó.

At that time there were changes, but not like now: with the Revolution succeeding, the Government concentrating on construction, they instruct people about new techniques, field irrigation, leaching off the alum, and draining water. We can have two crops, sometimes threę Continuously wére changing seed varieties, using research from overseas and here...Since Liberation in 1976 to now, theýve introduced 200, 300 varieties of rice already..if there is a variety planted for one or two years that starts to decline, the Government encourages to give it up.

[197]

Int: Trong thời Pháp, đầu thế kỷ 20 đến một chín bảy mươi mấy, những thay đổi về Nông nghiệp diễn ra như thế nào? 1ha/50 gia?
Int: In the French time, from 1900 to the 1970's, how did agricultural production change 1 hectare producing 50 gia?

Năng suất bình quân từ 800-1500 kg/ha...Thất lắm!
The average rate in those days was 800-1500 kg/Ha...Very low!

Int: 1 năm 1 gia đình cần bao nhiêu kg gạo?
Int: In one year, one family needed how many kg's of rice?

Tùy theo gia đình đông người hay ít người 1 người ăn mạnh cần 18 gia 1 năm = 360 kg...Nghèo qúa ăn cháo , ăn rau.
Would it be a large family or a small family One healthy adult eats about 18 gia 1 year, equal to about 360 kg...If you were very poor you would have to eat cháo [rice porridge], vegetables [field plants].

[215]

Int : Trong thời Pháp, có phai là nghèo qúa, phai bắt mấy con tự nhiên để có dủ Protein, dủ ăn?
Int: In the French time, if one was very poor, what animals could they hunt to augment their protein, to have enough to eat?

Ăn rau đồng...
They ate field vegetables...

Int : Từ 1945-1975, đất này thay đổi như thế nào?
Int: From 1945-1975, how did the land here change?

Trong thời kháng chiến, vất vả, vẫn theo cái cũ... Vùng căn cứ hướng dẫn nông dân làm thủy lợi, nhưng không được tự dọ..[sản xuất] 1,3 đến 2 tấn /hecta...1 vụ/hecta...Có đổi giống mơi, dân tiến bộ hơn: (sản xuất dúng thời vụ) ... Hồi đó [trong thời kháng chiến] dân tự xay luá ở nhà...Ngày đó không áp dụng Khoa học kỹ thuật.
...

In the time of the resistance, it was hard work, still following the old ways... The base [referring to the nearby Viet Cong headquarters for the Can Tho area] led people in doing irrigation works, but they could not work freely..[producing] 1.3 to 2 tons / hectare...one crop / hectare [per year] ... There were some changes in new rice varieties, farmers improved their skills: (growing and harvesting at the right time) ... At that time [during the resistance] people milled the rice by themselves at home ... they didn't have modern technologies.

[262]

Int : Thủy lợi như thế nào?
Int: What about irrigation?

Đập ngòi đắp ở vùng nào mình ở, mình qủan lý. Nhân dân cùng làm. Làm để ăn, sống, dánh giặc. Khổ, khó khăn , ăn rau, cải, ốc, cá. Cá lươn dữ lắm . Đồng thì bỏ hoang.

Dân bị dồn ra ấp chiến lược, (dàn bà, tre? con, người già). Người tre? tuổi theo Cách Mạng. Trong này phải tự lực mà sống để đánh giặc. Không kho xưởng, tiền bạc, chỉ lấy sức đánh giặc.

The people were rounded up and taken to the strategic hamlets (women, children, the elderly). The youth followed the Revolution here and they had to survive themselves in order to fight the invaders. There were no factories, no money, just the energy to fight the invaders.

We dug the drainage channels and dikes where we lived, and managed them. Everyone did this together. They did it for our living, and we did it to fight the invaders. It was tough, difficult...we ate field plants, mustard greens, snails, fish. There were plenty of fish and eels. The fields were abandoned.

[280]

Trong thời đó, sử dụng cây cỏ làm thuốc, trị bịnh chiến thương.
In those days, we used local plants to make medicine, to cure our war injured.

[282]

Bây giờ vô nước biển, bệnh viện, tây y ... "nhưng mà trong kháng chiến người ta vô nước dừa này không à. Bị thương người ta dùng nước nay không hà. Mà hổng vô là chết à..."

Now people use saline, western style hospitals..."but in the resistance we had to use coconut juice only. If injured, we used only this juice. If you didn't, you'd die."

[288]

Int : Nước nay sạch hơn nhưng không mặn, khó làm không?
Int: This water was cleaner but it wasn't saline, was it difficult to use?

Vạc, rồi đút cây kim vô trỏng. Chiến thương mà bị thương, ở ngoài có Peniciline, thuốc đỏ. Ở trỏng chiến thương chỉ lấy nước muối rửa Người ta lấy mật ong phết vô, băng bó.

We'd cut away the outer peel, then we'd stick the needle into the middle. Other soldiers that were injured, they had Peniciline, bromine solution [mercurochrome]. Inside the soldiers only used saline solution. We used honey applied to the wound, then bandaged it.

Int : Hay lắm!
Int: Interesting!

Cũng có khi lòn lỏi tiếp viện được một ít nước, nhưng chỉ có nước dừa cứu được chiến sĩ.

Sometimes we could get emergency aid supplies-a little bit of saline maybe, but most of the time we only had coconut juice to save a soldier's life.

[308]

Int : Nếu không có gạo ăn, ăn rau nào trong lung?
Int: If there wasn't enough rice to eat, could you get vegetables in the swamp?

Thiếu gì, bông súng, rau muống , bắp chuối...
Plenty - water lilies, spinach, banana flowers...

Mà không có đủ ăn...Tự lực tự cường, khoai lang khoai mì, tự túc tự cấp, cả bắp nữa.
But there wasn't enough to eat...you had to rely on your own abilities, sweet potatoes and taro, you had to deal with them and produce them yourself, also with corn.

Hiếu: Dân ngòai trồng lúa có trồng khoai nữa.
Hiếu: Besides growing rice, people raised sweet potatoes.

Int : Có vườn cây ở vùng này không?
Int: Were there orchards here?

Có ... vườn...xòai mít măng cầu Chỗ nào trồng được thì trồng, chỗ nào tàn phá thì thôị
Sure...orchards...mango, jackfruit, mangosteen. Wherever you could plant it, you did; wherever it was destroyed, you couldn't.

[331]
Int: Tàn phá từ năm nào?
Int: From what year was the villaged damaged [by war]?

Tàn phá năm 1952, ba chiếc rải từ ngã tư tới Cái Sơn. Dọn láng chỗ này thấy chỗ kia, nhưng mày sát hại tao, tao cũng trồng lại được.

It was first damaged [from the war] in 1952. There were three planes from the junction to Cái Sơn. They completely leveled things-this area, that area-you [guys] killed me, but I could still grow again.

[338]

Int : Tôi tưởng tượng vùng thiên nhiên đầu thế kỷ có rừng tràm nhiều, rừng to, ngoằn ngoèo, nhiều kiến, nhiều rắn độc.

Int: I imagine the nature in this area at the beginning of the [20th] century having a lot of cajeput, winding [branches], insects, and many poisonous snakes.

Rắn nhiệu Giải phóng rồi về chỗ này có nhiều ổ trăn, cua đinh, vì bỏ cỏ um tùm nó dẻ.
There were a lot of snakes. After Liberation we came back to this area here and there were many python dens, snapping [trionychid] turtles, because the grass grew freely, a good nursery for them.

Int : Người kháng chiến không sợ rắn sao
Int: Were the resistance fighters afraid of the snakes?

Ừ, có thuốc trị.
Yes, but we had certain special medicines.

[356]

Int : Phong cảnh lúc đó như thế nào?
Int: What did the landscape look like then?

Trong thời kháng Pháp đây là rừng. Khi Pháp vô, thời kháng Pháp trở thành vườn ruộng. Chủ đất trồng

dừa, măng cụt, bưởi, quýt, vú sữa, sau này thì .....
In the time fighting the French here there was forest. When the French came, we fought them in the orchards. The landowners planted cocnut, mangosteen, grapefruit, tangerines, comquats, milk apples, after that...

Int : Từ 1945 đến 1975 rừng trở lại vì không người làm canh tác?
Int: From 1945 to 1975 the forest returned because people didn't farm here?

Tuy đi nhưng cũng trở về trồng lúa, gặp giặc thì chết, hy sinh, nhưng cũng vẫn không sợ.
Although we left, we still returned to grow rice. If we met the invaders then we would be killed, martyred, but we were not afraid.

[387]

Int : Đất hoang nghĩa là gì?
Int: What did "wasteland" mean?

Đất hoang là vùng sâu, dân cư ít, mà kinh rạch cũng ít, đồng trống nhiều Có những đồng da khai hoang, có lập làng lập xóm trước đây rồi nhưng vì chiến tranh không ở được. Hoang có chứ không phải hoang rừng như hồi trước.

"Wasteland" was the backbrush, very few settlers, few canals, and a lot of abandoned fields. They used to be cultivated, with villages, with hamlets before; we coudn't stay there because of the war. "Wasteland" [Wild grasses] wasn't the same thing as "wilderness" [wild forest] as before.

...

[430]

Một công đất hồi trước là năm, bảy, hay một chục giạ. Giải phóng rồi mình làm một công mười mấy giạ. Bây giờ 1 công 60 giạ Gấp 6 lần hồi trước.

One cong of land before was 5,7 or 10 giạ After Liberation, one cong produced more than ten giạ

Int : Nghĩa là 1 ha là 6 tấn?
Int: That means one hectare was 6 tons?

6 tấn rưỡi.
6 and a half.

[447]

Vì thủy lợi có khai kinh, dân ở thành tuyến. Điều chỉnh được khu vực sản xuất. Có nơi 9 tấn, 7 tấn, hồi đó chỉ 1 tấn ngoài!
Because the irrigation network was widened and straightened, people resettled more orderly Allowing better control of the production zones. There were places with 9 tons, 7 tons ... in the past it was only more than 1 ton!

Int : Mỗi năm không thay đổi, 7 tấn?
Int: Every year it is steady at 7 tons?

Ừ.
Yeah.

[453]

Int : Vết tích rừng xưa?
Int: Are there any vestiges of the old forest?

Dang bảo tồn, khôi phục lại rừng sinh thái, nông trường Phương Ninh, Lung Ngọc Hoàng. Dang bảo tồn, phát triển lại sinh thái.

We're conserving, recreating the natural forest, for example Phương Ninh Reserve, now called Lung Ngọc Hoàng. They're conserving it, re-establishing the ecology

Interview 2
Ông Rỡ
April 12, 2002
Hoà Mỹ Commune
Phụng Hiệp District

[003]

Đất này về vấn đề nông nghiệp hồi trước là của người Pháp. Chủ đất gọi là Labastẹ
This land, regarding agriculture in the past it belonged to the French. The landlord was called Labaste.

Chuyện thứ nhất, chỉ có con Đông Lợi thôị Kinh Lái Hiếu, Bún Tàu , mà giờ người ta gọi là Quản lộ Phụng Hiệp. (Phụng Hiệp đi vô Ngã Năm). Trong quá trình đó, thằng Pháp nó ở điền, tả điền đông hơn Địa chủ. Vì saỏ Có 2 nguyên nhân:

First, there was only the Đông Lợi [Canal]. Lái Hiếu Canal, Bún Tàu, later people called it Quản Lộ - Phụng Hiệp Canal. (Phụng Hiệp to the 5-Way Junction). In that process, the French guys were here in the field, there were more tenants than landowners. Why? There were two reasons:

1/ Tháp trâu và bò, và thị gía bao nhiêu giạ lúa. Khi trúng mùa thì quyền sở hưũ thuộc về tá điền.
1/Breeding water buffaloes and oxen, the price had to be settled in gia of rice. When there was a good harvest ownership belonged to the tenant.

2/ Còn trăm ngang ngàn dọc tức là một trăm thước kinh, một cây số dọc cái kinh, có thể ca nô chạy trong đồng được, nhưng mà con cá thì tha hồ ăn, nó không cấm.
2/ And every 100 crossing 1000 long meant 100 canal meters, one kilometer following the canal, maybe canoes could enter the fields, but the fish were free for anyone to eat, those guys didn't prohibt this.
3/ Thứ ba, thiếu lại lúa ruộng, năm đó thất thì xóa bỏ tính năm khác; chứ không để lại lúa lãi như địa chủ. Cho nên Pháp địa chủ ở đâu thì tá điền đông lắm. Nó nằm ở Đông Lợi thì nhiều Còn kinh xáng này gọi là Nàng Mau [tiếp vùng] Xà no, múc trước năm 1940 tới ngã tư nhà máy cháy, mép từ đó ra ngòai...Sau vì lý do sao đó nó bỏ cù.
3/ Thirdly, if we owed rice, and that year the harvest was bad, they forgave the debt and started at zero for the new year. The French didn't compound the debt and interest over multiple years as did [Vietnamese] landowners. Therefore where there were French landlords, the tenants were very crowded. This happened a lot on the Đông Lợi [Saintenoy Canal]. And this canal here is called Nang Mau [connecting to the] Xà No [area]; it was dug before 1940 to the junction of the burned factory, from there out. Later, for some reason, they abandoned it.

[020]

Vậy là 1943 nó trở lại máy dầm, nó múc vô tới Cầu Trắng rồi bắc cái cầu xong nó kéo Xáng Năng [Nantes] vòng xuống Cầu Xáng, nó múc trở rạ Vậy kinh Xáng mới này hòan thành năm 1944. 1945 có giặc, người ta Đồng khởi, cách mạng. Vậy gọi tắt ngã tư này, ngã tư này gọi tắt là ngã tư nhà máy cháy Tức là Pháp cất nhà máy lớn, sáu cối, lớn lắm. Nhưng 1945 mình nổi dậy đập phá nhà máy, mình đào xới lấy cừ, bây giờ gọi tắt là nhà máy cháy

So in 1943, they returned with the dredges, and they dug to Cau Trang, then after they made Trang Bridge, they then sent the dredge Nantes down to Xang Bridge, and they dredged back here.This canal was finished in 1944. In 1945 the enemy soldiers returned, we rebelled, and the Revolution

started. This junction was in short called "burned factory junction". That means that the French built a big factory, 6 mills, very big. But in 1945, we rebelled and destroyed the factory, even dug up the floor, so that afterwards we called that land "burned factory".

(Hiếu) Int: À ngã tư nhà máy cháy là đó.
This intersection was "burned factory junction".

[030]

Còn vấn đề quá trình khai thác và làm nông nghiệp của người dân, tức là năm 1953..54 ở đây được chính phủ cách mạng làm tập kết, cấp đất hết cho dân, tức là cơ nhứt. Từ dưới sông lên một cây số cấp hết cho dân. Đầu dư bao nhiêu cũng cấp.

About the process of people establishing and working in agriculture here, in about 1953-54, here the revolutionary government got together, they granted land rights to the people, it was a preliminary step. They granted land from here to 1km from the bank of the river. With the extra land, they granted that to us too.

Int : Cái này là chính phủ Việt Minh?
Int: That was the Viet Minh government?

Ừ hồi đó gọi là Việt Minh.
Yes, it was called Viet Minh.

Int : Cháu có coi xem một số địa phương chí năm 1952 nói là một vùng đất tỉnh Cần thơ khoảng 50% là của Việt Minh, khoảng 50% của chế độ, còn vùng này của Việt Minh, Việt Minh cấp hết cho người dân?

I understand that according to 1952 monographs, about 50% of the land area in Can Tho province was labelled as belonging to Viet Minh, and the other 50% controlled by the southern regime. So this region belonged to the Viet Minh, they granted all of it to the people?

Nói chung là địa chủ ác bá, tức là địa chủ phản động...Tây chạy nó chạy theo nên đất đó Việt Minh được quyền quản lý cấp lại cho dân. Nhờ sự cấp đất đó, vì gìn giữ đất đó, người ta mới hiến con em trong cuộc cách mạng chống Mỹ thắng lợi.

Generally speaking the land lords were awful, they were traitors...the French left and they followed, so the Viet Minh claimed the right to manage and grant the land to the people. Thanks to this, because we wanted to keep it, we offered our children to the Revolution against the Americans and to our Victory.

[042]

Vậy, thời kỳ đó thất lắm, bởi vì cao trình là + 0,2, thấp, nên hồi đó vùng này có thể phát lấy cỏ trồng thuốc [hút], chứ làm ruộng không được, và trồng mía nữa.

So, in that time agriculture was not successful, because the elevation was only .2 meters MSL, very low, so we could only use this land for growing tobacco, but for paddy we couldn't--we planted sugar too.

Int : Nhưng ở đây thuốc lá bị đất ngập nước nhiều?
Int: But here tobacco would suffer from the wetland environment?

Không, làm mô, cỏ dữ lắm, ngang đây nè...phát lấy cỏ làm mô lên trồng thuốc.

No, we made raised beds, plenty of grass, it was this high [1.5 m] ...we had to cut the grass in order to make the raised beds to grow tobacco.

Int : Người Pháp có trồng thuốc không?
Int: Did the French grow tobacco?

Không, nông dân mình, hồi ở với Việt Minh.
No, just us farmers, just when we lived with the Viet Minh.

Int : Bán thuốc lá?
Int: Could you sell the tobacco?

Ừ, bán rồi mua lúa ở Long Mỹ về đây ăn. Vùng Long Mỹ cao trình cao, nó làm ruộng được...mình cao trình trầm thủy, không chắt ra khô đồng, không đốt được đất thấp.

Sure, we'd sell it then buy rice at Long My and bring it back here. The Long My region was higher elevation, you could have pady..here, the elevation is too close to water level, you can't dry out the field, you can't burn the straw because its too close to water level.

[056]

(Đào bề ngang 4 thước lấy đất hai lớp đắp lên cái mộ)
(You have to dig a dike 4 meters wide and take the clay from digging to make the raised beds.)

...

[062]

Khi tập kết xong dân tự đào mương chắt nước...phát động chỉ dạo, đắp đập qua thời vụ, đắp đập không cho nước sông lên, vụ khô dần, có máy cày, cày, xạ, tức là lúa một vụ, năng suất cao, dân phấn khởi lắm.

After the [resistance] effort was finished we each dug ditches in our fields to drain water...then there were instructive demonstrations, making dikes during the growing season, making dikes to prevent river floods, gradually drying the crop, using farm equipment...people were very excited with these advances.

Int: Khỏang năm nào?
Int: About what year?

Gần đây thôi, trước Tiếp Thu. Ngay Tiếp Thu thì còn lúa một vụ, lúa trung mùa (chín tháng chạp) thường ở đây một công 20..25 giạ là trúng lắm. So với thời vụ bây giờ thì thấp hơn. Nhưng người dân có dư, có lúa ăn giáp hạt không hết lúa cũ. Bây giờ năng suất cao nhưng tổng năng suất quốc gia không à. Thuốc trừ sâu vô đó ăn hết, trả nợ hết. Lúa kia chưa chín kịp, giáp hạt đói nữa rồi Gọi là tổng sản lượng quốc gia, nên bây giơ muốn trở lại mần 1 vụ thì không mần được. Đất manh múng qúa nhỏ.

Recently, just before 1975 ["take possession"]. In 1975 there was just one rice harvest per year, middle season rice (ripe in 12th lunar month) that usually proced 20 to 25 giạ per công [4000 - 5000 kg/hectare]. Compared with the crops now, its very low. People still have something left, they have rice to eat from harvest to harvest. Now production is much higher but people now just think about production in national terms [ie a generally good or bad year for the region and not for the individual]. But the chemical fertilizers and pesticides that go into that eat up most of the money after the harvest;

we have to pay off the debts for these supplies. This crop isn't yet harvested, but I already have to start preparing for the next crop and have to borrow money to buy the pesticides and fertilizers again. In terms of national production the harvests are successful, but with us individual farmers we are not as successful as the numbers show [because of the high tech input costs]. Even if we want to return to 1 crop per year, we can't. The land is divided into too many small pieces.

Thứ hai, 2 vụ, 3 vụ, thời gian phơi ải, thời gian để xạ lúa mùa là đâu có thời gian! Nên bây giờ Nhà nước cố găng cải tạo cây trồng, để cho hạ tầng cơ sở, nông dân dời sống lên. Nhưng khó lắm. Ngoài lúa không biết mần gì khác. Nói vậy chứ có mô hình mới làm được ... nhưng mà giờ lỗ hay lời cũng bám lúa thôị Năm nay gía lúa nhích hơn, gía mía đỡ hơn, lỗ muĩ nông dân thở thoáng hơn, nhưng vẫn còn nghèo lắm.

Secondly, with two or three crops a year, plus time for preparing the soil, preparing the rice...there's not enough time! So that now, the Government tries to improve planting techniques, to improve infrastructure and people's lives. But its very difficult! Besides rice, we don't know how to do anything else. I'm just saying...if there are new models then we can [improve] ... but now whether or not we profit, we only grow rice. This year the rice price is a little bit higher, the sugar cane price is better, and the farmer's nose breathes more freely, but we are still very poor...

[085]

Đứng trung gian nhìn vô người nông dân. Ơ thị xã, thành phố, thấy dân tháy máy Vô đây thấy nông dân cằn cỗi. Vì có tiền là có tất cả, nhứt bây giờ nông dân đây còn nợ lớn lắm. Ơ xã một ai không thiếu đâu? Dừng nói làm việc không thiếu. Cũng vì ba cái lúa này...

Generally speaking, if you look at farmers in the cities and towns, they look great-they're active, industrious. While here, they are all withering. With enough money, you can have everything. But especially here, farmers have big debts. Who here in the commune doesn't owe money?! Don't tell me that you can work hard and not owe. Just because of all this rice...

[091]

Tóm lại, lúa mùa 1 vụ thời trước kháng Pháp là luá chín trong ngoài Tết. Còn sau, chống Mỹ làm 1 vụ đồng áng để khộ..năng suất cao, nông dân ngon lành. Nhưng hồi phát dộng 2 vụ tới giờ, càng ngày càng đi xuống. Cái đó cụ thể, đi vật biện chứng, không nói đâu được. Nhà tui hồi đó làm lúa mùa, cả ngàn gịa, bảy tám trăm gịa một mùa.

So, summarizing this, seasonal rice, 1 crop per year, in the times before the resistance against the French (1945) was harvested just before or after Tet. After that, during the struggle against the Americans we did one crop and the fields had time to dry out...production was good, and the farmers did great. But since going to two crops til now, gradually decreasing. Thats a fact, you can't deny it. My family used to grow traditional rice [one crop] with from 700 to 1000 gịa in one season.

Int : Thời chống Mỹ ở đây lúa 1 mùa phải không? Nhưng chỗ khác có lúa thần nông phải không?
Int: During the American War was it traditional rice. Other places had IRRI rice?

Thần nông là 2 vụ, ngắn ngày
IRRI was 2 crops, short seasons.

[104]

Int : Ở chỗ khác gần thành phố (Ô Môn) có, nhưng vùng này chưa có?

Int: In other places near the cities (O Mon) they had it, but not yet here?

Chưa, Phụng Hiệp chưa có. Phụng Hiệp đầu tiên có ở xã Đại Thành thôi. Đại Thành tự chảy, ở đây tự chảy, nhưng lúc đầu tiên... Từ chỗ 20 gia mà thành 30, 40 gia, ai cũng ham...nhào vô mần, mà không thấy hậu qủa của nó. Thuốc trừ sâu, phân bón, chi phí cao.

Not yet, Phụng Hiệp did not yet have it then. Phụng Hiệp first had it at Dai Thanh Commune. From Dai Thanh it spread to here, but in the beginning... From producing 20 gia to 30 or 40 gia, everyone liked it. They really jumped in, but they didn't see the negative consequences then—pesticides and fertilizer cost a lot.

[110]

Int : Chỗ khác có đong góp phân bón, đóng góp thí nghiệm, có thể trồng được. Còn ở đây hồi xưa trước năm nào không có cái máy Kohler, máy bơm nước?

Int: If other places contributed the fertilizer, did experiments, possibly you could grow it. Before when did you have Kohler pumps, water pumps?

[113]

Sở dĩ chưa sản xuất nó, chứ dã có máy đuôi tôm. Thời chống Mỹ nhà nào mà không có máy. Con nít ba cao chạy giặc, xách máy chạy, giơ lên, hết lục bình để xuống để bơi, lựa lỗ trống để từ lỗ, từ lỗ, chớ bơi gần lục bình đâu có nổi, máy bay nó bắn chết. Nên khi làm Thần Nông mới sản xuất ra cái máy bơm nước. Mà trước hết là trường Đại Học sản xuất, đưa tụi này (hồi đó làm thủy lợi) bơm thử thì thua nông dân sản xuất. Vì máy ở trên, ống để chân vịt bơm ngược lên nó ướt mẹ cái máy, bugi ướt hết trơn, không năng suất.

We actually had "shrimp tail" pumps before we had the Kohlers. In the time fighting the Americans there wasn't a house that didn't have the engines (Kohler 4 hp diesel water pumps). [Kohler engines were used dually for pumping water and for an outboard boat motor.] When the kids ran away from the enemy soldiers, they took the boats with the engines, lifting the propeller up when they saw luc binh [water hyacinth] and letting it down again after to keep going. If they got stuck and the luc binh prevented them from moving away, then the planes would shoot them dead. You needed a water pump to work with the IRRI rice. At first, the University introduced their machines to us (those of us who worked with irrigation)...but their use wasn't as effective as the farmers. They mounted the engines too high up, causing them to tip over into the water...the engine got wet, the spark plug got
Wet...not effective.

[123]

Sa quạt bằng gỗ. Sau này bỏ hết làm bơm nước khác. Cái gì cũng qua qúa trình của nó. Có kinh nghiệm, nhưng nếu Đại học không làm ra thì nông dân không có học. Nên bây giờ có làm Thần Nông là có máy bơm nước. Bơm rất ít, sở dĩ bơm nhiều là làm 3 vụ. Vụ nay cũng phải bơm, nắng qúa, thiếu nước bơm. Kinh cấp 2 là cao trình kinh bằng mặt bờ.

We also used wooden devices [sa quat] for moving water. But after that, we gave it up for the water pumps. Everything takes some time to understand. We have experience, but if the University had not introduced those engines, we could not have learned how to apply them. So now, if you do IRRI rice, you have to have a water pump. But you have to pump a lot to do 3 crops. This crop [harvesting in May]

we also have to pump ... It is too dry and hot, not enough water to pump. Secondary canals were elevated as high as the embankments.

...

[129]

Thứ nhứt, kinh cấp 2 bơm lên mặt ruộng, nhưng kinh qúa cạn. Thứ hai, (interrupted talking)...

First, secondary canals can pump water into the paddy, but this canal is very shallow. Secondly...

Tôi tên Rỡ...
My name is Rỡ...

[140]

...còn hỏi gì nữa không?
...anything else to ask?

Int: Vùng này trong thời chống Mỹ bị bom nhiều. Con muốn biết ảnh hưởng về thiên nhiên, kinh rạch thời đó. (Từ 54-75), có đào vét kinh hay kinh rạch bị hư trong thời đó? Điều đó có ảnh hưởng như thế nào về nông nghiệp, cây cỏ?

Int: This area was bombed a lot during the American war. I would like to understand the influences of this on the environment, the waterways in that time. From 1945-1975, were the canals re-dredged or did they fall into disrepair? How did the condition of these waterways in this time affect agriculture?

Bom đạn chỗ này khỏi chê. Bị vì nó là xã điểm của huyện. Vùng căn cứ. Mỹ đi bỏ ở đâu không hiết, nhưng về còn dư đạn bao nhiêu cũng rề bắn. Ban đêm trực thăng chiến đấu ở sân bay Trà Nóc soi bắn sáng đêm, ngủ không được, nên mình còn lại đây là rất ít. Mình hình dung để bàn chân ở đâu cũng có đấu đạn hết. Bom Laben ở đây là nhiều nhất. Chất độc hóa học nó bỏ cũng nhiều lần nhưng kinh rạch thời đó không vét được, chỉ dọn dưới sông cho bộ đội đi mà dọn còn không xiết nữa. Bị vì 1 ấp còn 4,5 dứa dùng saò nạng đưa lục bình cho nó trôi xuống.

The bombs in this area were uncountable. Because this was the central village in the district, a Resistance area. The Americans bombed everywhere, and if they had any bombs left in the day, they dropped them here. At night, the fighters from Trà Nóc air base came shooting through the night. We couldn't sleep...many people died then...just a few survived. Just imagine you step everywhere and see all of the footprints of the bombs and all of the spent bullets. "Laben" bombs were used the most here. Agent Orange was also dropped here many times, but we couldn't [drain it by] dredging the canals. We could only clear a little bit of silt and debris in the main waterways to make passage for the movement of VC soldiers. It would take 4 or 5 people with big branches to push the lục bình out of the way so that they could pass.

[157]

...Mỹ để anh em còn bề ngang 3 thước bơi xuống, cũng trần ai, mà cũng nằm Đại ở xuống, dậy lá chuối, lá dừa, máy bay của loài F nếu bị bắn trúng là chết, không đi được...

...the Americans just left us water 3 meters wide to row our [xuong] tiny boats; it was terribly difficult, we just laid down in the boats and covered our selves with banana leaves, coconut palm fronds ... if the F-10 jets shot at us, we would certainly have died, couldn't go anywhere...

[160]

Tôi là người thực tế. Ngã tư này, tới khi đóng Tứ giác mơi bỏ vô kinh Tây, chứ không thôi vẫn ở đây. Nên kinh rạch rách hết, muỗi gấp 10 lần vì bom bỏ tới đâu, nước thúi tới đó. Nước thúi sanh muỗi dữ lắm. Nghĩa là muốn cất 1 chòi cao su về đi công tác, chuẩn bị về, lột khăn trên đầu quơ sanh tử, muỗi sà xuống mặt không chịu nổi. Muỗi cắn no là mệt nghỉ chớ không bắt được. Tui nói thiệt, không tố cáo ai, nên sự sung sướng cuả dời tui là nghèo mà vẫn còn sót lại để thấy dộc lập và kiến thiết, xây dựng của đất nước.

I am the real thing. At the junction here, because people closed the Long Xuyen Quadrangle area, I left the junction here for the West Canal ... otherwise, I would have stayed here. The waterways were all torn up. The mosquitoes were ten times as worse as before; because wherever the bombs were dropped, the water was stagnant. The stagnant water produced a lot of mosquitoes! We had a hut made from scrap rubber here; we used it for sleeping when we traveled through here during the war...I'd keep swatting back and forth at them with my head scarf - swat one way and they'd come from the other side - and they still bit me ... There were thousands of them, they just bit me freely-I could not kill them all. I am telling you the truth, not blaming anyone; therefore my life's happiness is that though I am poor, I survived to see the independence and development of my country.

[170]

Nhà nước chuẩn bị bắc cầu đền bù mà đòm hoài hổng thấy. Muốn coi được cây cầu. Mỹ Thuận thì thấy rồi.

The Government is planning to build a bridge here to compensate us, but I haven't seen it yet. I really want to see it. I've already seen the Mỹ Thuận Bridge.

[174]

Int : Cháu có 1 câu hỏi về thời tá điền, về chính sách cấp đất trong thời Pháp.
Int: I have a question about the time of the tenant farmers, about the policy of land grants during the French time.

Cấp dất... kinh này Xà No múc năm 1943
Granting land... this canal, to Xa No, was dug in 1943.

[The cross-canal to Saintenoy here was Nàng Mau, extended in 1943. Xà No refers to a 1903 canal connecting Cần Thơ with Vị Thanh. Saintenoy was dug from Một Ngàn on the Xà No Canal to Rạch Gòi and this later (1943) crossing with Nàng Mau Canal from 1943. The segment of Nàng Mau Canal from Saintenoy to Cầu Trắng was dug before 1940.]

...từ ngã tư này ra Cầu Trắng, bỏ cù múc trước năm 40.
...from the junction here to Cau Trang, it was dug before 1940.

Int : Đồng Lợi đi tiếp [từ đây] là Saintenoy Thế kỷ 19?
Int: The Đồng Lợi canal connected from here was the Saintenoy Canal? Dug in the 19th century?

Khúc kinh nầy là Nàng Mau, năm 1943, Xà No bên kia kià.
This canal branch here is Nàng Mau [cross canal with Saintenoy-Đông Lợi], from 1943, and the Xa No is over yonder.

[193]

Int : Trước đó, có Labaste, là Địa chủ nước ngoài ... có Địa chủ Việt nam lớn và nhỏ không?
Int: Before then, there was Labaste, a foreign land owner ... were there Vietnamese landowners of large and small parcels then?

Thú đông cũng như địa chủ nhỏ, có 100, 200 công đất...Trung đông có 1, 2 sào, hoặc 1 ha, 2 ha...Vậy nên phân loại đánh phú nông không phải là cường hào ác bá.

Besides the small landowners, we also had *thu đồng* who had about 100, 200 cong of land [10 to 20 hectares]...*Trung đồng* had less than *thu dong*, just 1 or 2 sao [1 sao = 1/10th of a hectare] or 1 or 2 hectares...Therefore, we didn't consider them as traitors who treated farmers so badly

Int : Địa chủ nhỏ không đủ đất làm ăn phải làm tá điền thêm phải không?
Int: Small landholders who didn't have enough to eat, they had to work extra land as tenants?

Tóm lại giai cấp cố bần trung nông ở đây thời Pháp không có cục nào hết trơn, chỉ là địa chủ...Mình người chết, phải lại chầu rượu, năn nỉ nó, lạy nó, nó chỉ cái lung cho chôn. Nó làm nhị tì ở cái lung. Bây giờ vị trí thay đổi...nô lệ trở thành người chủ, tức là chủ đất.

In short, the tenants and farmers here didn't own any piece of land at all in the French time. It all belonged to the [big] landlords ... If someone in my family died, I had to bring a tray with wine to the landlord, to get down on my knees and kowtow to him, begging him for a tiny piece of land to bury the dead. They used the swamp land as a burial grounds. Now that situation has changed ... we slaves now have become the land owners.

[217]

...

Bây giờ vị trí thay đổi; người dân ngày xưa làm thuê đất, nay làm chủ, nhà nước cho đất. Ở đâu nhà nước cho đất đó.
Now things have changed, the people in the past were tenants, and now they are owners--the Government grants us land. Wherever we live, the Government gives us land.

[235]

...

Int : Về sở hữu đất và việc nộp thuế, tình cảm của người địa phương thế nào?
Int: What about land ownership and paying taxes...how did local people feel?

Dồn điền Labaste, Đồng Khởi '45, tất cả tá điền chạy đập kho, đập dồ thôi...
The Labaste plantation, the 1945 Đong Khoi Uprising, all of the tenants destroyed everything of his - the storehouse [and the factory].

Int: Sau năm 45 không có ở đây nữà

Int: After 1945 he wasn't here anymore?

Đâu có! Chạy trước! Đồng Khởi nó chạy rồi...chạy trước. Còn Địa chủ bàn thờ còn đập vì địa chủ ác lắm. Tui nói chú nghe nè:
Not anywhere! He took off before! Đong Khoi came...and he fled before. Because the landlords were so terribly cruel and rude, we even came to his place and destroyed their family alters! Let me tell you why:

"Bài phong phản dế", diệt phong kiến, phản dế quốc. Thằng này nó ác lắm! Con cá bắt ăn không chọ.. trồng cây gì có trái là phải viếng, một năm ngày Tết phải đi viếng, mặc quần áo rách đi viếng là bị nó đánh. Địa chủ ác lắm.

"Erasing Feudalists and Imperialists" meant to destroy feudal practices and imperialism. Those bastards were so cruel! They didn't even allow us to catch the natural fish in the river...if we planted some fruit trees, we had to prepare a formal offering to the landlord at Tet. If you brought the fruit to their house wearing ragged clothes, you could be beaten very hard. Those landlords were cruel.

Cho nên thằng quốc tịch người Pháp ở điền Cờ Đỏ, ở Hộ Phòng... Ô Bạc Liêu, cũng có nhiều dường Pháp là dân ở đông vì cá bắt ăn thả cửa Ruộng ví dụ 1 công 4 gịa, đong không đủ, gieo mạ hết gạo ăn lại lấy lúa về , ăn, nữa 1 gịa , trả 1 gịạ Cho nên nó mị dân, nó có khoa học của nó nên tả điền bu ở đông lắm. Đất gặt đến đâu, cày sâu đến đó. Tức là gặt rồi, phơi ải [expose soil to ground to kill bacteria by heat - to till the soil, or leave it naturally], đến mùng 5 tháng 5 [âm lịch] đất nẻ hết trơn, mưa xuống, [dất] bông [lên] mơi làm mạ [seedlings].

So, those guys who were French nationality at Co Do [present day O Mon], at Ho Phong ... At Bac Lieu, there were French streets where a lot of farmers lived because they could catch fish freely For example, if you rented their land, at the rent of 1 cong = 4 gia; and after the harvest if you didn't have enough rice to pay, you could borrow from them again 1 gia and then pay 1 gịạ You see, they blinded you in this way They had their own policy, so tenants liked to live with them. Where was havested, it was deeply aereated. That is after havesting, the tilled soil was exposed to the ground to kill bacteria by heat. By mid lunnar year, the soil was cracked, and it rained down , the soil was loosened, so we started seedlings then.

Còn địa chủ để ướt , vì nếu để khô cá chết. Đi cắm câu , bắt được bỏ tù, đóng trăn. Cho nên cuộc Cách Mạng Việt Nam gian nan lắm - "bài phong phản dế"! Lúc đó mình yếu mà đánh dế quốc, địa chụ Thêm ba cái ông dân tộc tui nè hồi đó xuôi hướng theo Pháp hết trơn à: Miên,... dạo giáo Hòa Hảo, và Cao Dài nữa ... cho nên bây giờ ... nếu nghĩ lại kể ra kiên trì. Dường lối Dảng rất giỏi, lơ mơ buông sào Có những lúc cơ hồ cách mạng Miền Nam không còn.

However, the landlords left the soil wet, otherwise the fish could die. Were you caught fishing their fish, you could be sent to prison, wearing a heavy board of wood on your shoulders (to be fettered). We had a very hard revolutional time, - " erasing feudalism, kicking out imperialism" ! At that time, we were weak but had to fight against imperialists, landlords. Moreover, the ethnic groups (Khmer), and religious groups (Hoa Hao, Cao Dai) all followed the French... So now... remembering it , I think we were so brave and patient. The communist party's policies were excellent, otherwise we would have failed. There was some moments that the Southern Revolution seemed to die out. [271]

Int : Về thủy nông, chính sách thời Ngô Dình Diệm có một số chính sách khó khăn nhiều, không dám cấp đất cho người địa phương...không nói tới vấn đề người địa phương khởi nghĩa, về Hòa Hảo, Thiên chúa (theo tài liệu trong thư viện).

About irrigation, in Ngo Dinh Diem time there were some difficult policies like not giving land to local people, not talking about local peoplés rebels, about Hoa Hao, Catholicism...

[282] Thiên chúa hồi đó không dến dỗi, chủ yếu là Hòa Hảo,Cao Dài Cần Thơ là nhiều nhất. Cà Mau là Cao dài (Cao Dài vùng 4), Vĩnh Long... Bỏ đất ruộng trong quê ra đây ở dài dài Kinh Cùng 5..7 cây số, đặc hết.

The Catholic were OK, but mainly Hoa Hao, Cao Dai [who rebelled]. There were many of them in Can Tho, there were Cao Dai people in Ca mau (Cao Dai zone 4), Vinh Long... They left their fields and lands at home, and moved out here, they lived along Kinh Cung about 5 or 7 km, crowded.

[287]

Chết dịch, chết gì cũng ở hết. Rồi Dáng phái mạnh nhất là Bình Xuyên, Sài gòn. Nhưng khi tập kết rồi bộ ba phối hợp vào một giờ G nào đó lật dổ Ngô Dình Diệm. Nhưng khi họp xong thấy Bình Xuyên mạnh qúa, thời để nổ súng diệt Bình Xuyên cho hết rồi mới ra dánh, chớ nếu lật Diệm thì Bình Xuyên ra làm Vua à. Tranh chức. Ai ngờ giết được Bình Xuyên lùa vào rừng Sác, rồi Hòa Hảo Cao Dài lùa như cá chốt. Còn Ngô Dình Diệm phản động, 1945 lật đổ Bảo Dại, Ngô Dình Diệm là bạn thượng thơ của Bảo Đại chạy sang Mỹ, Mỹ nuôi ăn học giỏi (trong khi đó Pháp thua Đông Dương rồi không còn tiền phát lương) đưa Diệm về dậy Nhưng trong cái ác của nó, máy chém ở nông thôn bắt được Việt Cộng là chém. Còn địa chủ là trả thù giai cấp, vì mình lấy đất cấp cho dân cày hết rồi, nó giết (Lâm Quang Phòng), chôn từ hầm này sang hầm khác. Giết tá điền dữ lắm. Nhưng cuối cùng, y có ưu điểm là tinh dân tộc. Nghĩa là thua là thua cộng sản chớ không làm chiến tranh cục bộ.

Though they might die of anything, they still stayed here.The strongest party at that time was Binh Xuyen, Sai Gon. They planned that after grouping together, the 3 parties would act at the same time, a "G" time for example, to overthrow Ngo Dinh Diem. However, when they were meeting, the others 2 parties (Hoa Hao, Cao Dai) realized that Binh Xuyen was too strong, they decided to kill Binh Xuyen first, then started to fight Diem. If they overthrew Diem first, Binh Xuyen would be the King. Power competition. However, after Binh Xuyen was killed, and pushed into Sac jungle, Hoa Hao and Cao Dai were also thrusted as tiny fish. And Ngo Dinh Diem was reactionary (the traitor), he overthrew Bao Dai, in 1945 Ngo Dinh Diem was one of Bao Dai's Ministers. Diem was sent to America to study. In the meantime, the French failed in Indochina, so Bao Dai ran out of money to support Diem's study, Diem had to go back here. One of Diem's cruel policies was to execute the Viet Cong in the countryside by the guillotine. And the landlords, they revenged their class, because we took all their land to grant to field workers. They (Lam Quang Phong , for instance) killed a lot,and buried people from vault to vault. They killed tenants a lot. But finally, he (Diem) had a good point: nationalism. That means, he would rather be defeated by Cong San than have the American force directly jump in the war.

[311]

Cả chư hầu và Mỹ qua đây với 1 khối sắt thép khổng lồ, vũ khí hiện Đại chụp tên đầu mình. Y không chịu, nên tổ chức dảo chánh, giết họ Ngô đưa Thiệu lên. Thằng Thiệu là ác lắm, chính phủ bù nhìn. Hai thằng khác nhau Diệm có tính dân tộc, thà thua cộng sản chứ không chịu cho quân nước ngoài dem đủ thứ nước dổ lên đầu Việt Nam. Không phẩm giá nhưng nó biết Mỹ tổ chức giết nó.

The Americans and their colonials came here with giant metal tanks, modern weapons to drop on our heads. Diem didn't agree, so an overthrow was organized. They killed Ngo (Dinh Diem) and replaced him with Thieu. That guy-Thieu-was terribly cruel with his puppet government. The 2 guys were different.

Diem had a national trait, he would rather be defeated by Cong San than let the foreign force bring "douche" to pour on Viet Nam's head. He knew the Americans wanted to kill him.

[323]

Int:... Sử dụng cây cỏ trong thời kháng chiến như thế nào? How were plants used in the resistance time?

Cây mù u, lấy mủ làm ánh sáng thay cho dèn dầu, vì hồi đó không có đầu lửa Mù u lấy trái xỏ vô 1 cây dài, dốt cũng lâu, hoặc lấy mỡ chuột bỏ vô cái chén dốt tim dèn.

Mu u , we used its sap as a lantern, because at that time we didn't have kerosene. Mu u fruits was threaded together and could be used for a long time, or we poured mice fat in a bowl and burned cloth in it as a lamp.

[334]

Còn cỏ thay đổi như vầy: Vì đất phơi ải cày sinh cỏ nhẹ lắm, còn lại Thần Nông sanh cỏ nhiều lắm. Có loại diệt không được như cỏ bông cỏ, thuốc đặc trị nó xịt tới héo lúa mới chết nó nên thuốc mắc lắm. Trong thời bình lúa 1 vụ, chỉ cỏ lấy phảng chém 1 cái là ngập tay. Giờ mấy cỏ đó tiêu hết rồi.

And grass changed like this: the tilled soil didn't produce much grass, IRRI produced new strains of grass. There were some kinds that were impossible to kill like Bong Co grass (grass flower grass). Special pesticides for it sometimes wither rice, so it was very expensive. In the peaceful time, we sowed one kind of grass, Chi Co (string grass) that could be cut by phang. Those kinds of grass now have all gone.

[343]

Int : Nếu không đủ lúa, người dịa phương ăn cây gì trong thời gian đói?
Int: If you didn't have enough rice to eat, what would you have eaten when you were hungry?

Phải giữ. Không có thì trồng thuốc và đi đối lúa; dường 1 ghe đối gạo 1 ghẹ Bây giờ 1 ghe dường đối mấy ghe gạo, nhưng hồi đó gạo lức mà 1 ghe dường 1 ghe gạo Có những lúc ăn nếp gạo ngán qúa, ăn nếp lức (nếp trồng).

We had to save it. Or we could grow tobacco then trade rice. 1 boat of sugar could trade one boat of rice. Now one boat of sugar can trade several boats of rice, but at that time one boat of rice could trade one boat of sugar. Sometimes we were fed up with sticky rice, we ate draw sticky rice.

Int : Trồng đất ngập nước hay là... ?
Did you grow them in wetlands?

Vùng dưới, mua ở dưới.
No, we bought them in the region down there.

Int : Còn mấy hạt tự nhiên ăn ở đây phải không? Ví dụ 1 người trong 1 lung không có gì ăn trong ruộng thì ăn gì trong lung?
Int: What about natural seeds and grains? For example one didn't have any thing to eat in the field , what did he eat in the swamp?

Tụi tui không nhịn đói, nếu đói thì ăn chuối, ăn khoai mì.
We didn't starve, if we were hungry, we ate bananas, taro...

[365]

Có gạo ăn nửa lon,còn nửa lon nhường cho bô dội Lấy được 100 thùng gạo tui mừng bằng ai cho tui bạc 1 tỉ.

If we had rice, we ate half of them , we gave the other half to Viet Minh soldiers. If I (I was a soldier) was given 100 buckets of rice, I was as happy as I was given one billion dollars!

Ông Nguyễn Giới, giám dốc Sở Thủy Lợi Cần Thơ giỏi lắm! Trên Miền Tây này, kinh xáng nào, thằng Pháp nào, dào, thằng nào thi công, dịnh cao trình, Ông thuộc sạch sẽ. Sau này làm thứ trưởng phụ trách phía Nam. Bây giờ, Ông Chín Giới dang sống ở TP. HCM. Trường Đại Học biết rành Ông đó lắm.

Mr. Nguyen Gioi, the director of Can Tho Irrigation Bureau was excellent! All over the west, he knew clearly which canal was dug by which French guy. Later he became Deputy Minister, in charge of the South. Now Mr. Chin Gioi is living in Ho Chi Minh City. The (Can Tho) University knows him well...

[408]

Int : Chùa, miễu ở đây có không?
Were there any pagodas and temples here?

Rất ít! Vùng này đặc biệt, bơi vì nếu có đi tích thì mình giữ. Nhưng vùng này hồi đó Việt Minh (cộng sản). Hồi đó cũng mạnh tay với dị doan nên không ai cất chùa, miễu hết. Sau thời kỳ chống Mỹ, có cái chùa không phải Phật Thiền lâm, mà Phật cù lần, lần gót, lần dồ. Từ khi có Mỹ , có phật đó. Còn Hoa Hảo ở đặc dất, chỉ sa môn Hòa Hảo , nhưng mà khi bắt đầu nó chống Việt Minh, nó ra chợ ở sạch sẽ, rồi tứ tán hết. Giờ chỉ còn vùng nhiều nhứt là An Giang , Thốt Nốt.

Few! This is a special region, because if we have vestiges, we keep them. But in this region, Viet Minh (Cong San) were very strict with superstition, so no one built pagodas or temples at all. Later in the fighting American time, there was a pagoda, but there wasn't a real Thien lam Buddhist, there was only a dumb guy who pretended to live in a pagoda and made use of the people superstition to do bad things. Since the Americans came, that kind of "budha" appeared. And Hoa Hao believers lived densely here; only Hoa Hao believers, but since they started to resist viet Minh, they all moved to the market, and went away. Now they lived mostly in An Giang and Thot Not.

Int : Hồi thời Pháp, có chùa miếu ở vùng này phải hông?
In the French time, were there pagodas and temples here?

Không, hồi Pháp có miễu của Địa chủ. 1 hương chức Hội Tề có 1 miễu, mỗi năm cúng dình 1 lần, nhưng sau Việt Minh Đồng Khởi , nó mất gốc hết rồi, có lại chỉ dột xuất cá nhân, nó cất am ở nhà [dể] thờ chứ không có tập trung làng xã phải lo cúng hàng năm nữa.

No, in the Frech time, there were some temples of the landlords. A village offical had one temple, and they had a ceremony annually; after the Viet Minh rose up, they were cleared off-just some individuals built small temples at home, not having the whole village to be responsible for the ceremonies every year like before.

Int: Về dộng vật đặc biệt của vùng này?
How about special animals in this region?

Dộng vật cá đông nhất vùng này, Cá tròn, rắn.... Cá ở vùng này lớn, cá trê, cá lóc thứ gì cũng lớn hơn người ta, rắn rùa số dách, ở Phụng Hiệp. Bây giờ hết, mần ba cái thần nông này thậm chí con cá bị xịt riết cũng chết.

Fish was the most crowded in this region. Round fish, snake... Fish in this region was big: tre, loc, every kind was bigger than that of other regions, snakes and turtles were number one in Phụng Hiệp. Now, they all are gone, because of doing IRRI, people have to use pesticides that kill all the fish.

[447]

Hồi ông bà mình vùng này mấy cái lung lớn này, sau khi mình dở hơn, Vua Hòang Lân của Miên dem voi nuôi lùa về Miên.
In our ancestors's time, there were some big swamps, then we did worse, the Khmer King Hoang Lan brought the elephants back to Cambodia.

Int : Ông có thấy voi ở đây không?
Did you see elephants here?

Voi hồi ông bà mình ngủ mắc quýnh mõ ngủ canh voi, phá dữ lắm, giờ không còn, chỉ tập trung ở sở thú, sở cầm viên.
In our ancestors' time, to be able to sleep, they had to beat drums to prevent the elephants. The elephants damaged the land heavily Now, they are gone, we just can find them in the zoo or a park.

Lung là chỗ nuôi cá ngon lắm.
Swamps were the best place to grow fish.
[461]

...

Int: Ngòai trồng lúa, có dùng lung này như thế nào?
Besides growing rice, how was this swamp used?

Hồi đó lung này phong phú, cá lóc mùa này to lắm, nhưng càng ngày càng khô nắng dai khô nẻ...Hồi đó lung nứt nẻ như vầy, mưa đầu tha hồ bắt lươn, nó nổi bị phèn nó chết, cá cũng nổi, bây giờ không có nữa.
In the past this swamp was rich, loc fish was very big in this season, but it is drier and drier, it is too hot and crackly dry..

(Hiếu) Int: Theo ông là do xẻ kinh rạch?
According to you, it is because of digging canals?

Cái gì cũng phải có hệ thống của nó, nhưng kế hoạch bây giờ ...không dám chê nhà nước,
Đứng về phía cá nhân tui nói thôi, hễ có ký hiệu gì kinh đó hồi Pháp là dem Xáng cạp lại múc.
Ví dụ bây giờ 3 cây số có 3 kinh cũng có Xáng cạp múc thì đây nè... chỉ ngay xuống sông là kinh Xáng 1, má xáng cạp là kinh xáng 2,... mà cháu làm nhiều đầu mối quản lý nước không được, nước đi tùm lum. Ví dụ giờ tui nói hơi xa, DBSCL, Đồng Tháp, An Giang, 1 cọng bông súng ăn 1 nhà, dài 4..5 thước; lũ càng cao, dân càng xung, ruộng càng trúng, cá càng nhiều Bây giờ bày đặt ngăn lũ, ngăn riết nước chảy tới Kiên Giang, Mỹ Tho hết trơn thậm chí mấy vùng đầu nguồn cũng ngập, bị trám bằng bờ vầy nước tìm dường di, đi hòai hết các tỉnh. Tui nói mấy chú có kiến thức, mấy chú rút kinh nghiệm. Rồi năng suất cao: hai triệu tấn lúa / Tỉnh / năm... Nhưng mà nước lên vài chục centi là cuốn

gói, rồi cứu hòai, cứu tới khi nước giựt ... Còn nếu tập trung khu dân cư ở thật dông, đào tôn cao môi trường còn ác nữa. Người ta ở thưa vậy chứ môi trường không sạo..

Everything has it own system, but the present plan... I don't dare to blame the government, personally speaking, they dredge every canal that was dug in the French time. For example, now every 3 km there are 3 canals, they dredge all, this... right this river is canal 1, and the dredging is at canal 2, ... but when you do many places, you can't manage the water, the water goes everywhere.For instance, I'm talking about a little far places in Me Kong Delta like Đong Thap, An Giang... there used to be a giant mud lotus, called bong sung (a kind of water flower which is similar to lotus and lives in the same water environmaent as lotus), the stalk could be 4 to 5 meters long, and enough for a family to eat. The higher the flood was, the stronger the people were, the better the havests were, and the more fish we have Now people block the way of the flood, the more they block its way, the more the water spreads away Water flows to Kien Giang, My Tho, even the regions from which the water starts are floody, because they make dikes, the water has to find the way to run, and it goes to every province.I've told you that you have knowledge, you should draw out the lesson from this. And then, high productivity: two millions tons of rice per province per year... However, when the water rises up some teens of centimeters, we have to run away, then save (people, rice.) , save untill the water lows down... If people live too densely, it will be too bad for the environment. The environment is OK when it is thinly populated.
[488]

.

Int : Hồi trước năm 1975, có khu dân cư vùng này ngập?
Before 1975, were there habitat areas here?

Có An Giang ngập chứ ai, bây giờ Đồng Tháp, Kiên Giang, Tiền Giang, ngay cả Long An. Biển Dông, nước triều lên tiêu hạ lưu, ra Biển Dông. Bây giờ xả ra Biển Tây Không ăn thuạ Lúa mần 2, 3 vụ, mà tháng nước dố, vụ 3 cản trên đồng.

Only An Giang was floody, now Đong Thap, Kien Giang, Tien Giang, even Long An do, toọ From the East Sea, the tides rise up and flow down to the West Seạ Now the water is flowed out to West seạ And to no use! We do 2,3 crops, but during the month that water flows, the third crop in the field blocks it's way!
[530]

Int: Về thời Pháp?
About the French time?
...
Pháp múc kinh xáng đầu để để phá hoang, lưu thông kinh rạch, tính cai trị trăm ngàn năm, ...dúng ra là hay nhiều..Dân, khẩu hiệu nước dến đâu, dân dến đó...Rồi sau khi dồn điền...Pháp đầu tư kinh cấp I cấp II.

Trăm ngàn ngàn dọc, 500 thước có kinh lên ngàn thước có kinh...ca nô dầy như "điền Tây mặt đỏ"... cả triệu héc ta chớ ca nô chạy sáng đêm tối ngày Còn xả phèn, cống có tiven [valve] quay, ván gỗ căm xe...tức là nó quay ra cho nước chảy ra ầm ầm, đó là tháng mưa, tháng 5,6 âm lịch mưa già, nó thả cống. Để khô nẻ, đất còn dẻo, muốn không muốn nó bắt buộc người dân tá điền lùa trâu ra cày, cày [xong], dem phơi ải, nó đóng cống. Khi nào mưa nó đóng cống. Đất tốt lắm...Bây giờ công mấy chục giạ không tốt nữa.

First of all, the French dug the canals to clear the waste land, to ease the canal ways-they intended to

dominate us a thousand years, ... that's right...that was good... We, we went everywhere the water went ... After the plantations, the French invested in level 1 and level 2 canals...

Hundred wide, thousand long, every 500 meters there was a canal, every thousand meters up, there was a canal... too many canoes like the canoes of "the red face French landlord" ... million hectares, canoes ran days and nights. About flowing alums, there were grill valves at the gates, and wooden boards, and spokes... that means, it helped the water flow out in rainy months; in the fifth, the sixth month of lunar year, it rained heavily, they opened the gatę Letting the soil dry and crack, when it is still pliable, even you didn't want to, the guys forced the tenants to push water buffaloes to aereate the fields; after exposing the fields to the sun, they closed the gatę Whenever it rained, they closed the gatę Very good soil. Now we do some teens gia per cong , the soil is not that good.

Interview 3
Mr. Hai Vũ
April 12, 2002
Hoà Mỹ Commune
Phụng Hiệp District

[014]

Int: Về bản thân...
About yourself

Tôi sinh tại dây Năm này 78 tuổi...Ông Bà Cha Mẹ tại dây..Qua [Tôi] sinh dẻ tại đây, dời Ông Nội, dời Cha bây giờ tới dời Qua [Tôi]...
I was born here.I'm 78 years old this year. My grandparents and parents were from here. I was born here, my grandfather's generation, my father's generation, now my generation. ("Qua" is a pronoun that Chinese people often use to instead of "Tôi") to mean "me" or "I"

[024]
Int: Ông Bà của Ông ở đây trước người Pháp, phải không?
Your grandparents had lived here before the French, hadn't they?

Ừ ... Vùng này là điền Tây của Labastẹ Tôi ở đây từ thời Ông Labaste còn sống. Ngày (Pháp thuộc) đó dân khổ, quần áo không đủ mặc, chết không đất chôn, phải dến chầu rượu xin điền chủ ra chôn nghĩa dịa, chứ không phải chôn ở chỗ mình dang ở. Nó phát cho mỗi người một lô (50 công), nhưng thực là 50 công chỉ còn hai mươi công. [interesting bc different from VN culture]

Yeah.. this region is Labastés French land. I've been living here since Mr. Labaste was alivẹ At that time, people 's lives were miserable, there was not enough clothes to wear, not land to bury the dead bodies, people had to offer wine to ask for landlord's permisson to bury in the cemetary, not not bury in the place where we were living. The landlord gave everyone one lô (50 công), but actually it was just 20 công.

Mỗi người mượn lúa ăn 20 giạ, 1 giạ trả hai giạ, vay 40 giạ trả 80 giạ Ngày xưa làm lúa phải chịu sự điều khiển của điền Tây, không được tự dọ

Everyone borowed rice to eat, ẹg 20 giạ, borrowing 1 gia and paying 2 giạ-you borrowed 40 giạ and should pay 80 giạ. In the past, growing rice was controlled by French landlords, not having any freedom.

Nói thí dụ, tới mùa nước chưa có, cỏ chưa già, còn non trong, nó kêu mình phát, minh phải phát! Phát rồi, cỏ non, không có nước, nó lên. Nó lên cái rồi, rồi nó bắt mình chế lại một lần nữa! Nội cái đó không, mình mần, giang lưng lớn mần lấy hột lúa mà ăn thôị Rồi tới mùa, kinh xuống cạn hết trơn...xung quanh, nó đi canh, tuần ... Mình ăn thì phải xin bông [lúa] nó. Mà dễ gì...Nó phát rồi, tới khi gặt hái rồi, nó cho ăn một gia hoặc hai giạ thì mình dạp, mình phơi, mình ăn. Chứ không có được tự do dạp, phơi Khổ. Nhưng tới mùa rồi, nó dem chẹt [nghĩa], táo, cọp rằn, nhân công lại nhà mình, lúa bao nhiêu nó xúc hết! Không còn một táo cho gà ăn. Mà rơm của mình dã đập, nó tốc ra, nó suốt, nó vạch, nó kiếm. Nó sợ mình giấu ở trỏng...Lấy sạch trơn, không còn.
...
For example, when the wet season hadn't come yet, the grass was still young, they asked us to clear,

we had to do! After done, the grass was young, without water, it grow fast, Then they forced us to clear the grass again! Just that, we worked a lot, (giang lưng lớn : an expression showing the picture of the farmers working in the field, they bend their bodies downs to row the seeds or to cut the grass, their backs "look at" the sky) just work for some rice to eat. Then the harvest come, the canals were dry, around there, they went around to keep the rice.If we wanted to eat, had to beg them rice.But not easy..They cut it, when it was harvested they gave one or 2 giạ, then we beat the rice, and exposed to the sun to dry it and eat then. We could be free to do anything with the rice miserablẹ But when the harvest came, they brought canoes, "striped tigers" (a special kind of canoe) and people to our houses to rob up our rice! They even didn't leave any táo of rice for the children foods. And the rice traws that we had from beating the rice was checked violently They thought we hid rice in the straws taking everything, nothing left.

[055]

Ăn 20 giạ trả gấp dôi
You ate 20 giạ and you have to pay double.

Thời Pháp ác lắm, chạy ghe dưới sông mà bị vướng bụi rau muống hay cọng cỏ, hay cọng dừa, về nó ghi lại lô đất [parcel] của ai phạt 3 giạ lúa, phải trả 6 giạ!

The French was cruel : if their boats were stuck by some rau muống or some grass, some coconut leaves, they took the name of the person who lived at that parcel, and fined him 3 giạ ò rice, which he had to pay 6 giạ!

...
[Interviewer misunderstands the meaning, and the interviewee explains again]

Vậy mà điền Tây dễ hơn điền chủ Việt nam. Điền Tây bóc lột nhân công thôi Vay 40 trả 80. Chủ Điền Việt ác hơn.

How ever French landlords were easier than Vietnamese landlords. French landlords required human labor only. Borrowing 40 and paying 80. Vietnamese landlords were more cruel.
[refer to Interview One to see how the Vn landlord did not forgive debts in case of a bad harvest]]

[079]

Cỏ hồi xưa là cỏ sông chằng, cỏ nước mặn, môn, lác, năng.

The grass in the past was sông chằng (river grass), salty water grass, môn, lác, năng (kind of grass that grow tall in the wet soil)

Int : Nếu không ăn lúa gạo, ăn gì?
If not eating rice, eating what?
[084]

Chuối, khoai mì. Điền Tây không cho trồng khoai mì, vì nó phát mỗi gia đình hai con bò, sợ bò ăn mì.

Banana, sweet potato. French landlords didn't allow growing khoai mì, they gave a family two cows, they were afraid the cows would eat the taro.

...
[093]

...
Int: Thủy lợi, nước thời đó so với bây giờ?
About Irrigation, how the water at that time compares to it now?

Thời đó không nhiều kinh. Tới mùa khóa đập lại sợ dân chở lúa
The was not many canals. When the harvests came, they lock the dikes, cause they were afraid the people would steal rice.

[104]

Int: Tá điền nếu không đủ ăn thì dùng cây gì trong lung?
If the farmers didn't have enough to eat, which plants in the swamps did they eat?

Cá, nhưng không được đào dìa, mò, nơm cá tự nhiên, chứ không được chài như bây giờ.
Fish, but couldn't dig lake. We caught them naturally, we weren't allowed to catch by net as we do now.

Int : Ngày đó không được đi bơi trong lung?
Weren't allowed to swim in the swamps either?

Ừ bơi mé bờ thôi, vì giữa lung sâu lắm. Bây giờ múc lung làm thủy lợi rồi.
Yeah, but just swimming near the shore, because it was very deep at the middle of the swamps. Now the swamps have been dreged for irrigation already.

Int : Động vật thì sao
How about animals?

Cá Bông, Cá, Lươn, Rắn, Rùa, Cua dinh, hồi đó nhiều lắm.
Bông fish, fish, eel, snake, turtile, a lot.

...

[120]

Int : Trong thời Pháp, đất này thay đổi như thế nào? Ông Labaste về nước, người điền chủ trên vùng này trồng lúả
In the French time, how did this land changẻ When Mr. Labast went to French, did the land owners here grow rice?

Chỉ làm ruộng thôi, khi mình đang đánh nó thì làm cho nó ăn, khi mình nắm chính quyền thì vẫn làm ruộng.
Just farming (growing rice) when we were fighting with them, we worked and they got the products, then we take the governance, we still grew ricẹ

[137]

Int : Việc dàn ông dàn bà giống nhau hay khác nhaủ
Men's and woman's work are the same?

Dàn bà hồi đó cực hơn dàn ông. Dàn bà làm ruộng và con cái
Woman were working harder than men. They worked in the field and took care of children.

Int : Việc đào mương làm liếp của dàn ông hay dàn bà.
Digging ditches and making raised bed were man's or woman's job?

Chỉ làm ruộng thôi, không có lên liếp (mới day thôi). Ngày xưa muốn đào sông phải hỏi điền Pháp cho mới được làm.

Just working in the field. Not making raised beds are (raised beds are recent). At that time digging river must be allowed by French landlords.

[157]

Dàn ông làm ruộng dàn bà đi cấy, không có nghỉ chủ nhật, không có rằm mùng một.
Men worked in the field, woman grew rice, not Sunday, no full moons off work.

[164]

Thời kháng chiến thay đổi, thỏai mái hơn, vẫn làm lúa, chưa lên liếp, liếp chỉ làm sau hòa bình thôị
It was changed in the resistance time, more loose time, still growing rice, not making raised beds yet, raised beds has just been done sinece the peace time (1975)

[172]

Int : Nhà Labaste ở đâu?
Where was Labastés housè

Chỗ trường học bây giờ.
At the school now.

Int : Dịa chỉ ở đâu?
What was the address?

Khỏi từ dưới chợ mới có, ở đây Tây không hà.
Out there from the market, a lot of French people lived here, too

Int : Trong thời đó có chủ đất nhỏ không, hay chỉ chủ đất to thôi
At that time were these landlords who owned little land or just were there rich landlords?

Xạ của hai, ba ngàn, 3 mùi.....
Mr. Xạ Của had 2 or 3 thousands công and Mr. Ba Mùi....

Int : Có cần làm tá điền không?
They need tenants?

Điền chủ cho dân mướn dất, nó không làm, cho mướn mắc hơn điền Tây
Landlord owners lended land to people, they didn't need tenants, the renting fee was much more expensive than the price that French landlords asked.

[194]

Int : Cây cỏ xưa : thay đổi thiên nhiên, cá thay đổi như thế nào?
About the grass, the tree in the past, natural changes and how did fish changè

Ở đây chỉ có cá đồng thôi, nhưng vùng này thuộc lung Bên Hông, hồi đó cá dữ lắm, rùa rắn lươn cá dữ lắm mà có từ lúc hòa bình lập lại thì bớt vì dân giờ văn minh hơn, dân nhiều dánh bắt dễ.

There only were field fish here, but this region bolonged to Bên Hông swamp, there were a lot of fish, turtiles, snakes, eels, fish but since the peace time returned there were fewer because the people are now wiser, they caught the easily the animal.

Int : Hiện tại bị ảnh hưởng của thuốc?
Now are there animals affected by chemicals and pesticides?

Cá chết.
The fish died.

[209]

Int : Trong lung có thuốc sâu nhiều
A lot of pesticides in the swamps?

Ừ, nhưng mà bây giờ kinh khai lắm. Hồi đó đâu có kinh như vầy Đồng bao la, không có kinh thủy lợi, thành thử con cá đi tới lui dẻ, sanh ra, lớn trong vùng đó thôi, không như bây giờ, kinh cạn lu bu, ra vô đi được. Hồi đó kinh này dọc qua tới Cái Sơn, đâu có kinh nhỏ như vầy, tới mùa thì ở trển thôi, bây giờ kinh rạch múc lu bu, nên bây giờ thay dổi. Hồi đó lươn rắn ở đây, bây giờ muốn ăn con lươn không dễ gì kiếm.

Yeah, but canals are a lot. There were not a lot of canals like these. Huge fields, no irrigated canals, so the fish could be traveling around, generating, growing in that region a lot of canals travel is easy. This canal was straight to Cái Sơn, there were not small canals like these, when the season come, the fish were stuck up there. Now there are too many canals, so it is changed. At that time eels, snakes lived here, now it's not easy to find one.

[220]

Int : Ở vùng này đầu thế kỷ 20 có rừng tràm phải không?
There were cajeput forests here at the beginning of the 20th century, weren't there?

Có chứ, hồi đó ở lung này người ta đào dìa lấy lung biết bao nhiêu tràm tọ
Sure, at this oxbow, people found buch of giant cajeputs when they were digging ponds to make swamps.

Int : Cái lung ngòai kinh phải không?
Was that swamps out there at the canal?

Ừ ngang đây ăn dọc xuống dưới
Yeah, across here and straight down there.

[230]

Int : Năm nào cắt hết cây tràm?
In what year were the cajeputs all cut down?

Hết trong lúc Tây về, Tây khai phá, dốt hết trơn để làm ruộng, tràm chết thì ở dưới dất, sống thì nó dốn phá dặng nó khai nó làm ruộng. Từ lúc mình quên còn nhỏ 3, 4, 5 tuổi không nhớ mấy vụ đó, trong lúc tràm còn ông già tui biết.

They were gone when the French came, The French cleared the land, burned out everything to make fields to grow rice, the dead cajeputs were in the ground. The alive ones were cut down. At that time I was just 3,4 or 5 years old, I forgot a lot. My Dad knew clearly about cajeput.

Tui nhớ Ba tui lúc về đây bắn được một con voi ăn thịt và còn để lại một cặp ngà.
I remember my Dad's shooting an elephant for meat and he kept the ivorys as souveniers.

[247]

Int: Từ 1880-1910 có một thời gian cắt rừng tràm hết, con voi là hết vùng này?
From 1880 to 1910 , the cajeput forests were gone, and the elephants were gone too?

Ba tui nói lại ổng bắn voi trước tui, chỉ thấy một cặp ngà.
My Dad said that he shot the elephant before I was born. I just saw the Ivories.
...

[252]

Int: Hồi xưa vùng này có dình chùa không?
Were there any pagodas or temples here?

Có dình Hòa Mỹ, Tây phá hết, còn có Miễu thôị Nhưng bây giờ không còn
There was Hoà Mỹ temple. The French destroyed all, there were just small (superstituous) temple, now not any more, either.

[263]

Int: Còn vết tích, đi tích thời cổ ở đây không?
Are there any vestiges left here?

Không.
No

[275]

Int : Nghe nói ở kinh Lái Hiếu có Nguyễn Trung Trực...

It is said that Nguyễn Trung Trực temple was at Lái Hiếu canals.
Dình thờ do người dân tôn thờ chứ không phải quê ổng.

The temple was built by people who adored him. It's not his homeland here.
...

Interview 4
Mr. Ba
April 13, 2002
Hoà An Commune
Phụng Hiệp District

[005]

Int : Ông sinh ra ở vùng này phải không?
Were you born here?
[006]

Tôi ở đây từ nhỏ dến lớn, sinh trưởng ở đây, nhưng những vùng phụ cận theo như kinh rạch, ông hỏi là tui nói được, những vùng phụ cận trong vùng này nè, còn xa nữa không biết. Nhưng trước đây đầu tiên hồi ông già tui mới một hai tuổi là múc kinh xáng Lái Hiếu. Hồi trước nó có ngã lạch từ sông Cái Lớn và Cái Bé, nằm đây, năm bên Hỏa Lựu đi vộ Sông Cái Lớn nằm dây Sau thời Pháp mở con kinh đó là kinh xáng thứ nhất.

I've been living since I was born, if you ask me about the canals in surounding areas and this neighborhood, I can tell, but if asked about the ones farther than in this place, I have no idea At first, when my dad was only one or two years old, Lái Hiếu canal was dug. At that time, there were aqua-ways from Cái Lớn and Cái Bé here, from Hỏa Lựu straight in. Cái Lớn river was here, then Lái Hiếu was the first canal made in French time.

Int : Kinh xáng thứ nhất là kinh Lái Hiếu phải không?
Was Lái Hiếu the first canal?
[016]

Ừ, Xáng Lái Hiếu. Đồng thời trong đó trước một dôi năm gì đó, mở con kinh xáng xuống Bún Tàu, xuống Ngã Năm thẳng Cà Mau luôn. Kinh Xáng đó mở trước kinh Lái Hiếu. Lúc đó ông già tui còn nhỏ, năm nay ông 119 tuổi rồị Ông biết rành vụ khai thác con dường này Dến sau này cùng con rạch này kêu Kinh Tổng Năng (trong bản dồ có). Kinh Tổng Năng đó, Bác Ba tui năm nay 115 tuổi, ổng có đi làm xâu con kinh này, lúc đó chừng 20, 21 tuổi. Tính tới nay kinh này gần 90, 100 năm rồị

Yeah, Lái Hiếu canal. One or two year before that, there was a canal dug down to Bún Tàu, then down to Ngã Năm, then straight to Cà Mạu That canalwas dug before Lái Hiếu. At that time, my Dad was small, now he is 119 years old. He knew clearly about making this road. After that people called this canal Tổng Năng (map). My Third uncle, who is 115 years old now, also worked in digging this canal, at that time he was 20, 21 years old. Now this canal is 90 or 100 years old.
[030]

Int: Kinh này làm trước Kinh Xáng Lái Hiếu hay sau?

Was this canal made before or after Lái Hiếu?

Sau, kế cận cũng dôi ba năm chứ không lâụ
After, just 2 or 3 years later, not long.
[031]

Int: Hồi trước đào kinh này có một rạch thiên nhiên phải không?

Before people dug this canal, was there a natural arroyo?

Kinh này đào thẳng lên Kinh Cùng, Kinh Cùng nối liền với Kinh Nhà Nước [Canal Lacôte], đào xuống đó nối với ngọn Sông Cái Lớn. Sông Cái Lớn có bản dồ là ngọn Cái Sơn, Kinh Nhà Nước dồ thẳng xuống đó. Kinh đó lâu dời dữ à.

This canal was dug straight up to Kinh Cùng, Kinh Cùng was connected to Nhà Nước canal, digging down to connect to the beginning of Cái Lớn river. Cái Lớn river was mapped with Cái Sơn, Nhà Nước canal flowed straight down there.That canal is very old.

[038]

Int: Tổng Năng ý nghĩa gì?
What does Tổng Năng mean?

Tổng là chánh Tổng, Đứng làm kinh này và lộ giới này luôn. Sau này chánh phủ Pháp cấp cho ổng cái ngũ dằng bội tinh mần con lộ.

Tổng mean " general principal", he was responsible for making this canal and this border way, too. Then the French Gorvernment offered him a medal for making the street.

[042]

Int: Tặng cấp bao nhiêu hectả
How many hecta was he granted.

Cái đất đó hả? Nói chung qui vùng này, mấy con kinh tui nói đó, coi như nó nằm lọt trong xã Hòa An, nằm nửa bên xã Phương Bình. Thẳng qua tới đây là xã Hòa An, nó nằm trong hơn một xã. Cái diện tích lớn.
His granted land? Generally, this region (the canals I've told you above) fully was in Hòa An, and in half of Phương Bình. Straight here was Hòa An village, it was located in more than one village Huge åea.
[046]

Int : Ông Tổng Năng sống gần dây?
Did Tổng Năng live near here?
[047]

Ổng sống thời Pháp thuộc, ổng làm chánh tổng thời Pháp, chết trong thời Pháp, sau con ổng nối nghiệp.
He lived in French time, he was the Canton Chief in French time. He died in French time, then his children continued his job.

[049]

Int : Trước thời Pháp hả? Trước kháng chiến?
Before the French time? Before the resistance?
Trước lâu Ổng chết trước. Thời kháng chiến con ổng còn lại
Long before that. He died before that. His children were living in the Resistance time.

[051]

Int : Con tên gì?
What were his children's names?

Là Nguyễn Hiền Kỳ, Nguyễn Hiền Thân. Là con ông Tổng Năng. Sau Ông Cả Kỳ cũng làm Chánh Tổng.

Nguyễn Hiền Kỳ, Nguyễn Hiền Thân were Canton Chief Năng's children. After that, Mr. Kỳ also became the Canton Chief.

[055]

Int : Trong thời nào?
In what time?

Thời Pháp
In French time.

Int : Trước kháng chiến?
Before the resistance?

Trước.
Before.

[056] Trong thời đó ông có gặp chánh Tổng phải không?
Did you meet the Canton Chief?
[057]

Tui lúc đó còn nhỏ. Chỉ ông tui thuật lại, những cái lớp đó tới lớp tui còn đây, thì năm 45 tui mới 15 tuổi, tui mới biết. Trước kia, người lớn nói thôị Cái này là nói quá khứ, hàng trăm năm.

I was small then, that was told by my grandfather. I was 15 years old in 1945, so what happened before 1945, I don't know clearly, just older people could tell. It was a hundred years in the past.

[063]

Bây giờ tui nói thời 45 trở lại dây Đó qua 47 có lính quốc gia, nhà nước kháng chiến. Lúc đó Pháp đóng ở ngoại Thành phố, còn quân đội Việt Minh ở trong khu giải phóng, cấp đất chia cho dân, phát cho dân cày đất của bất cứ địa chủ nào cũng vậy, đánh đổ địa chủ, địa chủ theo Pháp ra Thành Phố ở. Trong này chánh phủ Việt Minh cắt đất chia cho dân. Chia dân, đầu tiên khai Kinh Giải Phóng (chỗ Kinh 6 Thọ nối lên Kinh 4 Thước), đó là kinh Việt Minh dào, Kinh 4 Thước là Ông Tổng Cả Kỳ dào..

Now I'll talk about the time since 1945. In 1947, there were " national soldiers" [French and allied VN soldiers], the country started resistance. At that time the French force was in outskirts areas. And Việt Minh army was in Liberal campuses, they granted land to people, they gave the land of the landlords to farmers, they dismished landlords, then the landlords followed the French to the cities. Here Việt Minh cut lands to give to peoplẹ Firstly, they dug Giải Phóng canal [Liberal canal- Translator] (at the place where 6 Thọ connected up to 4 Thước canal), Giải Phóng canal was dug by Việt Minh. 4 Thước canal was dug by Canton Chief Kỳ.

[080]

Ông Cả Kỳ khai Kinh 4 Thước thẳng xuống nhà việc Long Bình, bây giờ là ấp Bình Hiếu, bây giờ có chợ Long Bình.

Canton Chief Kỳ dug 4 Thước canal staright down to People Council Long Bình, which is Bình Hiếu village now, there is a market called Long Bình now.

[084]

Thời Tổng Kỳ là trước 45 từ 1925 đến 19...?
Mr. Kỳ's time was before 1945, from 1925 to 19 . . .?

[085]

Khỏang 1930 mấy..
In about 1930 something.. .

[087]

Con Kinh 6 Thọ là 1947 (lúc cấp đất) đào nối với Kinh 4 Thước, lên đó chẻ ngã ba, Bốn Thước đào xéo xuống Kinh Nhà Nước, còn Kinh 6 Thọ đào tắt lên dây

6 Thọ canal was in 1947 (at the time of granting land), it was connected to Bốn Thước canal, up there, it went into three directions, Bốn Thước canal was slanting down to Nhà Nước canal, and 6 Thọ canal was shortly dug up here.

[092]

Int: Kinh 6 Thọ tới ngã 3 với Kinh Nhà Nước tới ngã ba gặp kinh Lái Hiếu?
6 Thọ canal met Nhà Nước canal and Lái Hiếu canal at the intersection?
[093]

Kinh 6 Thọ ra sông cái nối với vàm Lái Hiếu. Vì kinh xáng Lái Hiếu múc tới sông Cái Lớn. Kinh Xáng Lái Hiếu dâm đây nè, rồi nhánh này lên đây đi vòng đây nè, lên đây đi một dường qua ngọn Cái Sơn, sau này lên... Hồi tui còn nhỏ biết là Kinh Chạch 6 có đào trong này 1dường nữa. Kinh Nhà Nước ngay ngã ba này đào thẳng lên Kinh Cùng từ ngọn Cái Sơn.

6 Thọ canal was connected to Lái Hiếu at the main river, because Lái Hiếu was dug along the way to Cái Lớn river. Lái Hiếu went out here, and this branch went up here, then went round here, and straight to Cái Sơn. When I was small, I knew that Chạch 6 canal had another way in here, toọ Nhà Nước canal right at this fork was dug straight up to Kinh Cùng from Cái Sơn.

Int : Trong thời kháng chiến đào Kinh 6 Thọ.
People dug 6 Thọ canal in the resistance time.

Trước kháng chiến đào kinh Nhà Nước.
Before the resistance, people dug Nhà Nước canal.

Int : Tới đây phải hông? Tới Cái Lớn?
To here? To Cái Lớn?

Kinh 6 Thọ dổ ra sông Cái Lớn.
6 Thọ canal flowed to Cái Lớn river.

Int : Giữa kinh Nhà Nước và sông Cái Lớn.
Between Nhà Nước and Cái Lớn river.

Sông Cái Lớn vô tới trong này, kinh 6 Thọ vô tới trong này khỏang 2 cây số nữa mới tới dầm Lái Hiếu dổ ngang.
Cái Lớn river came in here, 6 Thọ canal came in here about 2 km where Lái Hiếu came across.

Int : Còn vùng này là vùng Phương Bình, nghe nói đất ở Phương BÌnh là đất Bà Bái
And this place is Phương Bình, it was said tha Phương Bình belonged to Bà Bái land ?

Kinh Bà Bái Để tui vẽ con kinh Bà Bái Ngay vàm Lái Hiếu có cái rạch vô là ngọn của Cái Lớn. Cái rạch vô ... vòng vòng vô đây, lên Xẻo Xành thẳng qua Kinh Nhà Nước, nhưng Bà Bái nằm trong khỏang này Ở đây Vàm Cái Caọ Vàm Cái Cao có dường lên kêu là rạch Bò Môn.

Bà Bái canal. Let me draw Bà Bái canal. Right at L ái Hiếu, there was a small arroyo going in, this is the beginning of Cái Lớn river. The arroyo went round .. . round here, up to Xẻo Xành, staright to Nhà Nước canal, but Bà Bái was in this part. Here was Cái Cao canal. Cái Cao canal had a way up there called Bò Môn arroyọ

[117]

Bà Bái vô tới trong này rồi, con kinh xáng mới múc là năm 91,92 gì nè. Kinh xáng đó múc thẳng ngay kinh Bà Bái, nhưng mà nó múc dứt ngang cái rạch tui nói đó, bây giờ chỗ rạch này kinh múc ngang bắt cây cầu rồi Thẳng xuống hậu cứ rồi, lên trên này dường kinh đào Giải Phóng trong thời gian chiến tranh mấy ổng dào, bây giờ bắt ngang cây cầu chổ kinh Giải Phóng nữa, lên này là Cầu Móng, thành ra dường đó liền xuống dưới có 3 cây cầu- tráng nhựa xong hết.

Bà Bái came here, the new canal was dug in 1991, 92. That canal was dug straight at Bà Bái canal, but it cut the arroyo I've just told you, now there is a canal with a bridge on. Straight down ther, then up here where Giải Phóng canal was dug in the war , now there is a bridge across Giải Phóng canal, up here is Cầu Móng, down there there are 3 paded bridges.

126

Nhưng trong cái kinh này, là kinh của Đồng Tu Hú, múc thẳng vô Bà Bái
But here is the canal of Tu Hú field, [koel field -Translator] which is dug straight to Bà Bái

Int : Tại sao gọi là Đồng Tu Hú?
Why was it called Tu Hú field?

Có một thời gian dân ở trong đó được viện trợ nước ngòai hết, mỗi gia dình dều có.
There was a while when people there was aided by foreign coutries.
[Not clear here about the meaning of Đong Tu Hu]

Int: Tên Cái Sơn, Cái Caỏ
And the names Cái Sơn, Cái Caỏ
[Not answering the question directly but continuing to describe the features of the local canals]

Cái Sơn cách Cái Cao khỏang 5 cây số (dường chim bay thì không tới), nhưng dường sông đi vòng vòng là 5 cây Kinh xáng Lái Hiếu vô chợ Cái Sơn là 3 cây, ở đây có kinh Ông Lý Phùng Tiết (Chủ Kịch), chợ Cái Sơn ngay đó. Trệch lên đây một cây số, đào kinh Xáng Cụt (bây giờ) thẳng nối với kinh Nhà Nước lên tới Kinh Cùng luôn. Xáng Cụt múc sau

Cái Sơn is 5 km from Cái Cao (if measured by birds' routes, it is shorter), but by river route, it is 5 km. It is 3 km from Lái Hiếu canal to Cái Sơn market. Cái Sơn market is at Lý Phùng Tiết (Chủ Kịch) canal. Up here one km, Xáng Cụt canal is connected to Nhà Nước canal up to Kinh Cùng.
Xáng Cụt canal was dug later.

Dường ngã ba Cái Cao rẽ lên 2 dường, Cầu Móng (ngang lộ)..... Bản dồ Hòa An.
Cái Cao fork goes to 2 branches. Cầu Móng (the other side of the road). Hòa An's map.
Bản dồ Hòa An...

[157]

Kinh dài Kinh Tổng Năng. Ở đây có cây Cầu Móng, doi này bên Phương BÌnh thuộc kinh xáng Lái Hiếu.
Long canal. Canton Chief Năng's canal. Móng bridge was here, this promontory was in Phương BÌnh, belonging to Lái Hiếu canal.

Int: Kinh Tu Hú, Kinh Tắc đào năm nào?
When were Tu Hú (Koel) canal and Tắc canal dug?

Kinh Tu Hú khỏang năm 90,91. Những con kinh này bắt đầu trên chợ Kinh Cùng, kinh này thấu lên Kinh Nhà Nước, Xẻo Xành vô ngã ba dâm lên con Kinh Nhỏ. Kinh Nhỏ thấu lên Kinh Nhà Nước. Dường này múc hết thẳng đây múc lên Xẻo Trâm dường này múc lên tới Cầu Móng, bề rộng 17m, những kinh này nhà nước đầu tư múc. Những khúc này Nhà nước bỏ, bây giờ dang đề nghị cứu vãn 200 mấy chục mẫu đất này

Tu Hú (Koel) canal was in 90,91. These canals are from Kinh Cùng market, this canal is connected to Nhà Nước canal, from Xẻo Xành head to Nhỏ canal. Nhỏ canal goes traight to Nhà Nước canal. This road was dug straight here to Xẻo Trâm, this road was dug up to Cầu Móng, 17meters wide These canals were supported by the government. The government abandoned these parts, now more than 200 mẫu of land here are being required to be saved.

Int: Ông sinh ra vùng này?
Were you born here?

...

[181]

Int: Trong thời Ông làm ruộng hết vùng nảy?
In your time, the whole region here were farming?

Hồi trước thì làm ruộng.
At that time just farming.

Còn vùng từ mí lộ kinh Tổng Năng qua đây tòan là đất bỏ. Trước kia của địa chủ, quan, Tổng Kỳ, Cà Tượng, và nhiều địa chủ khác. Bây giờ của dân, một số của nông trường.
And from Canton Chief Năng canal to here was abandoned land. Before, this land had belonged to the

landlords, the mandarins, Canton Chief Kỳ, Tượng and many other landlords. Now the land belongs to the inhabitants, some belongs to [Hòa An] state-run farm.

Int: Trong thời ông ở đây, đất này của những người dân vùng này? Người dân có đất hay thuê
In your time, has thisland belonged to the inhabitants here ? Have they own the land or have they rented it?

Bây giờ tạm cấp chứng khóan làm sở hữu chủ, quyền sử dụng dất. Của nhà nước, nhưng cấp cho dân quyền dùng dất, chứ dân không có đất tự Chung quy là nhà nước cấp cho dân quyền dùng, ví dụ: khu của ông hồi trước là tui ở đây trước, ba trăm mấy chục công, làm điền, nhưng trái lại bây giờ phân phối hết, bấy giờ tui chỉ còn hai mẫu rưỡi (25 công). Thanh tóan hết, bây giờ tất cả mọi người dân dều có.

Now they are comtemporarily given the right of owning and using land. It is government's land, but the government gives people the right of using land, people don't privately own land. Generally speaking, the government gives people the right of using land, eg., your campus had belonged to me before, I had more than 300 công, I was a landlord, but now it is passed out, I just have 2.5 mẫu (25 công) left. Divided up, everyone has some land.

Int: Trước kháng chiến vùng này người làm đất thuê của địa chủ hay....?
Before the resistance, people rented land from the landlords, or . . . ?

Vì nhiều giai dọan lắm... vì kháng chiến . Hồi trước đất này không phải của tui, của ông ngoại tuị [Còn] trước của Ông Nội tôi ở vùng Cả Cao, sau bị thanh tóan chia cho con châu người một mớ, ngèo bán hết giờ còn tui, ông bà già tui mới chiếm phần đất này của ông ngoại

Oh, many periods, ... 'cause of the resistance . .. This land was not mine but my mom's father. And my Dad's father's alnd was in Cả Cao, which was divided and given to his chilldren then. Later, because they were too poor, they hasd to sell their land. Just me keep it. My parents got this land from my Mom's father.

Phần này của ông ngọai, phần này mép bên lộ dá.
This part belonged to my Mom's father, this part is at the stoneroad sidẹ

Int : Đất này là đất bỏ....?
Was this the abandoned land?

Đất này (coi như là) hồi trước có chủ chứ không phải không, nhưng mà chủ đất bao hóa, người ta làm thuế người ta đóng thuế, người ta làm chủ thôi, chứ đất này hồi đó không có mua Đó là thời dĩ vãng. Sau này người nào chiếm, ai muốn xài thì sang, kẻ chiếm nhiều thì sang ra cho người ta, là chiếm nhiều thì sang, là những người đó là chiếm hữu thộị Trong thời gian chiếm hữu qua hai tình trạng từ năm 47, rồi tới năm kháng chiến chống Mỹ là 21 năm rồi, đất dai tọa lạc kẻ sang người bán, này kia, người ta chiếm tới bây giờ, thành ra không biết bao nhiêu là chủ rồị Số này chia ra thành nhiều phần, mỗi người một mớ, một số nằm của nông trường (khỏang giữa)

This land had owners before, but they just had the inhabitants rent it and the inhabitants paid renting tax. Owners owned land, no inhabitant bought land at all. That was the past. After that, people possessed land, and sold it to others, it was just a way of possessing land. There were 2 periods of possessing land, form 1947, then in the time of fighting the Americans, 21 years, , the land was owned by many owners. This land has ben divided into many parts, everyone gets some, some belongs to [Hòa An] state-run farm (midle part).

(Hiếu) Trại nghiên cứu
Reseach campus.

[224]

Nông trường hồi trước thì ở dưới này 1 ngàn, ở trên 2 ngàn. Nông trường chiếm trước là 3, 3 trăm mẫu(3 ngàn công), nhưng sau này cắt để cho kinh tế mới ở trên, còn ở dưới này còn một ngàn công. Nông trường bây giờ còn 1 ngàn công.

The farm had had one thousand (công) down here before, two thousand (công) up there.The farm had had 300 mẫu (3 thousand công), but then they cut the part up there to give to people who came to clear the waste land, they just kept one công down here.Now the farm has one thousand công.

Int : Còn nông trường còn ở đây từ lâu?
For how long has the farm been here?

Từ năm 1976
Since 1976.

Int: Trước 1976 không có nông trường ở dây?
Before 1976, was there a farm here?

Không, từ năm 76 trở lại đây
No, just since 1976 up to now.

(Hiếu) Lúc đó ai quản lý?
Who managed the farm at that time?

Lúc đó của Nhà nước, của chánh phủ thôị
The government.

[237]

Int : Từ lâu đất này là cây tràm hay là đồng ruộng?
Was this land cajeputs or fields?

Cái của nông trường hồi trước mấy ổng mở là đất thấp, đất không tốt, cấy chết, xạ ăn được 1 năm. Mấy ổng chiếm là đất cỏ, bỏ hoang. Thời gian do dân ở đây không làm vùng này, vì cho trâu ăn.

It was low, not good land. We couldn't grow rice here.We just tried it one year. It was abandoned grass land. At that time the inhabitants of this regions didn't work on this land, because the land and the grass were for raising buffaloes.

[246]

Int : Nghe nói vùng này nổi tiếng về con trâu? Trong thời xưa...
It is said that this region was famous of buffaloes? In the past . ..

Int: Trong thời xưa, người muốn nuôi trâu, người vùng này, người địa phương?

In the past, were the people of this region , the local people who raised buffaloes?

Trong vùng này mà cấy hái xong để lùa dến đây để cặm, cặm trâu, mướn người ta giữ, có người Ví dụ: tui có một dôi trâu mướn ông này giữ, ông kia mướn ông này giữ, một người có thể giữ 50,60 con. Hoặc người khác lãnh trong này nhiều người lãnh nuôi trậu

After farming, the buffaloes were taken here and some people were hired to keep the buffaloes. 1 person could keep 50 or 60 buffaloes. Here there were many people who did that job.

Int : Trong thời đó, không dám bắt con trâu của người khác phải không?
At that time, people didn't dare to steal others' buffaloes, did they

Nếu mà trịch, trâu đặc biệt là của làng mình mà còn bị ăn trộm duổi nữa. Nếu ông không giữ là ăn trộm duổi. Mà mình mướn người ta giữ, mất người ta chịu..nếu mình bỏ đồng lang là mất.

If you were not careful, the thieves stole even the buffaloes of the people in this village If you hadn't kept them carefully, the thieves would have stolen the buffaloes. If you had someone keep your buffaloes, they should be responsible for your stolen buffaloes. If you didn't have anyone keep your buffaloes, they were stolen.

Int : Trong thời đó trâu rất quan trọng, vì không có máy để trồng cấy, thì phải dùng con trâu, và con trâu như một cái xe hơi, mắc lắm.

At that time, buffaloes were very important, 'cause there was no machinery for farming. We had to use buffaloes, and a buffalo was considered as a car nowadays, very expensive

Cái thời đó chỉ có trâu và bò nhưng cuối cùng vùng này chỉ xài trâu không hà, bò nó dở, trước có bò. Ông ngoại tui hồi trước 30,40 con bò lận.

At that time, there were only buffaloes and oxen, cows, but in this region, people just used buffaloes only Oxen and cows were not good. My mom's father had 30,40 oxen and cows.

Int: Con bò?
Oxen and cows?

Cầm bò, vì ở đây 3,4 chủ cầm.
And you could pawn the cows and the oxen. There were 3 or 4 mortage stores here.

Int : Con trâu của vùng này là trâu thiên nhiên phải không?
Are the buffaloes in this region natural buffaloes?

Trâu này trong sách kêu là trâu bưng, loại trâu ở đây là lớn con nhất, còn trâu Phú Yên thì nhỏ con, trâu dàn ta nuôi dàn bỏ lún. Cái vùng Phú Yên không như vùng này, vì mỗi người có nuôi người ta deo lục lạc, khắc sừng làm dấu, người ta thả rong không người giữ, nhưng muốn bán người ta gom trâu về người ta bán đâu thì bán. Cho nên những nhà nuôi ở cái vùng Phú Yên hồi trước trâu nhỏ con hơn vùng này Vùng này gọi là trâu bưng, trâu lớn con.

This kind of buffaloes is called " swamp buffaloes" in the books. It is th biggest kind here.The buffaloes in Phú Yên were smaller, raised in flock and wandered freely Phú Yên is different from here, people had the buffaloes wear bells, and they carved their horns to mark the buffloes, then let them roam in the field, when they want to sell them, they gathered the buffaloes, and sold them. So Phú

Yên's buffaloes were smaller than those in this region. Swamp buffaloes here were bigger.
[280]

Int: Cháu nghe nói Bò là người Việt mang từ miền Bắc vô miền Nam, con trâu là hồi trước do của người Khơ me giới thiệu trong Đồng Bằng Sông Cửu Long mà không biết vùng này có nhiều Khơ me làm.

I've heard that cows and oxen were bought to the South from the North by the Việt , and buffaloes were introduced in the Mekong Delta by the Khmer, but I'm not sure if there were any Khmer doing farming here.

Cái... ông nói dúng rồi Vùng này trước đây mình chiếm. Hồi dời ông cố tui xuống đây, coi như tới đây tính tròn một trăm năm rồi, ổng xuống đây, những gia đình Miên, rút vô có vùng. Ví dụ ở đây hồi trước Miên có ở tui có đào những mấy gò, những cái " chắp" Miên còn, nhưng mình ở đến đâu mấy ổng rút vô ở thành Sóc nào theo Sóc nấy Không ở lẻ tẻ, bị vì mấy ổng không thích người Việt.

Youre right. This region was possessed by us before.In my grandparents' time, which was about one hundred years ago, the Khmer lived in certain areas. For example, there were Khmer people living here, but wherever the Việt lived, the Khmer went away and they gathered together in "Sóc" [Khmer village- Translator]. They didn't like to live with the Việt.

Int : Không thích và họ không bán trâu cho người Việt?
They didn't like the Việt and they didn't sell bufaloes to the Việt, either?

[The interviewee didn't answer]

Số trâu này ông nói dúng, hồi lúc trước gốc chắc của Miên, bị vì đất này chung qui từ gia đình trở về đây là Miên không.

You are right about these buffaloes, they might originally come from Cambodia, because there were a lot of Khmer people here.

Int : Miên vùng này có đông người hay là người này đi tùm lum?
Were there a lot of Khmer people here?

Nhiều, theo bây giờ gom lại tính cũng nhiều lắm như ở Xà Phiên, ở Xà Phiên Sóc Miên lớn lắm (Xà Phiên là Long Mỹ đi xuống)

A lot, there are a lot now, like in Xà Phiên, in Xà Phiên there is a very large Khmer village (From Long Mỹ , if you go down, you will get to Xà Phiên).

Int : và họ có thể đi từ Xà phiên dến đây để từ....
And they could come here from Xà Phiên?

[300]

Bây giờ mấy ổng ở lẻ tẻ thì ít. Chớ mấy ổng gom qua ở kinh Chín Thước. Kinh Chín Thước giờ có chùa Miên. Mấy ổng về ở đó khoảng trăm ngòai hai trăm gia đình. Mấy ổng gom lại mấy ổng ở chớ không ở chung với mình.

Now some of them live sparsely , most live condensely around Chín Thước canal. There is Khmer pagoda there.There are nearly two hundred Khmer families living there.They like to get together and

live near each other, they don't like to live with us.

Int : Hồi trước 200 gia dình Miên có chùa ở đâu?
Where were the two hundred Khmer families and the pagoda?

Ở Kinh 9 Thước. Vùng này rút qua đó. Vùng này rút qua Nàng Mạu
Around Chín Thước canal. This region is connected to Nàng Mau.

...Thời chúa Nguyễn vô đây chiếm, mấy ổng ở lai rai, nhưng mà vùng đất này hồi trước là rộng. Coi như là nếu có ở 1 dãy như vầy là 2,3 chục gia dình chứ không phải mấy chả ở lẻ tẻ, bị ở rừng mà. Rừng mà tui biết khai thác rừng này tới giờ là thời ông cố tui xuống đây còn rừng, còn cọp.

In Nguyễn Dynasty, they lived here, this was a large area Twenty or thirty families lived together in one area, 'cause this was jungle When my great grandparents came, there were tigers.

Int : Trong thời Khơ me, Khơ me ở đây có con cọp?
In the time the Khmer lived here, tigers were living here , toỏ

Mấy chả ở đây là có cọp mới tập trung, ở lẻ tẻ sợ cọp, heo rừng dữ lắm, trước đây khỏang tròn 100 năm.
The guys [the Khmer-Translator] had to lived together because of so many togers and wild pigs, that was about a hundred years ago

Int : Trong thời đó có cây tỏ Tràm?
Were there big trees? Like cajeputs?

Tràm vùng đất tui nói là đất doi, đất tốt, hồi trước tràm không à. Cái doi đất đầu Xẻo Trâm hồi ông cố tui chiếm ở bển cũng là tràm không. Trong đó thời xuống đây mấy ổng đi săn heo rừng, nhưng thỉnh thỏang có cọp, tượng cũng có, nhưng tượng nằm ở cái vùng Sài Một, cách đây hơn 1 cây số.

There were cajeputs in this promontory region, good land, plenty of cajeputs before.In the promontory at Xẻo Trâm where my great grandparents lived, there were lots of cajeputs. At that time they hunted wild pigs, sometimes tigers or elephants appeared, but elephants mostly lived in Sài Một, 1 km from here.

[334]

Voi có, cọp có mà ít.
Ther were not many elephants and tigers.

Int: Trong vùng này có cây sao và cây bự không?
Were there "sao" trees and big trees here?

Cây bự là cây sao, dái ngựa (Swietenia macrophylla - rosewood) nhiêu lọai cây lắm, tui không biết hết. Nó nằm dài theo rạch Bà Môn, đi
giáp vòng qua cầu Xẻo Trâm (bản dồ). Bây giờ cây lớn còn nằm ở dưới

Big trees were Sao, dái ngựa (Swietenia macrophylla - rosewood) and many others. I didn't know them all.
They were along Bà Môn arroyo, around Xẻo Trâm bridge (map). Now big trees are still lying underground.

...[ignores the question]

Có người móc lên cưa ngựa xài Cây đó tui biết vì múc xáng cho nông trường. Cây đó tui gặp cái vỏ bằng cái bàn này Cây đó hai người vòng qua không giáp....
Some people dug them up to make wooden beds. I knoew that kind of tree when I dug the canal for Hoa An farm. The peel of that tree was as big as this table Two people couldn't arm around that tree

Cây lớn qúa múc không nổi.
The tree was too huge to dig up.

Hồi đó đi chơi vùng đó thường lắm, đi bắt chuột và này kia nữa...chuột dữ lắm. Ba người đi dặm khoảng 2 tiếng đồng hồ khoảng vài trăm con.

I used to play there, catching mice and other animals. Lots of mice.Three people could catch some hundred mice in two hours.

[380]

ignores question]

Lúc đó cá cũng có, hồi ông Quang giữ nông trường này, thằng nhỏ con tui đi nhấp cá hai con hai ký. Cá mấy ổng nuôi tụi nhỏ lén vô nhắp.

Lots of fish, toọ Mr. Quang was the keeper of this farm, my son stole fish there, two fish weighed 2 kgs. They raised fish, and children stole them.

(Hiếu) Int: Cái đó là gần dây?
Is it recent?

Gần đây đó nhẹ Nông trường này cá dữ, nhưng từ khi ông Quang nghỉ rồi bỏ dân nó làm hết

Recently This farm had lots of fish, but since Mr. Quang stopped working there, the fish were abandoned, people stole them all.

(Hiếu) Int: Bây giờ chắc hết?
Are the fish all gone now?

Hết.
Gone.

Int: Còn hồi trước lọai cá nào ngon nhất bự nhất?
What was the best the the biggest kind of fish at that time?

Ở đây cá rằn, cá lóc, cá rằn con nào con nấy bằng bàn tay
Cat fish, rằn fish, especially one rằn fish was as big as your hand.

(Hiếu) Int: Cá Sặc rằn hả?
Was it Sặc rằn fish?

Ừ cá lóc cá trê nữa.

Yeah, and cat fish, too

(Hiếu) Int: Có cá Bông không ông?
Were there Bông fish? [Bông fish is a kind of cat fish- Translator]

Cá Bông thì thời tôi còn nhỏ, chứ cấp sau này hết cá bông rồi
When I was small, there was Bông fish, but now we can't find them.

Cá Bông hồi mấy năm trước tôi đi tản cư mấy năm Hòa Hảo, hồi năm 47 48, sông này hồi trước nước trong xanh, phèn. Thỉnh thoảng đi một khúc thấy nó làm ổ một cặp, con ký ngòai, ký ngòai

In about 1947, 1948, (which was called Hòa Hảo years), ther were a lot of Bông fish. The water of this river was clean and clear, and there was lots of alum. Walikng along the river, you could see the fish make their nests, and they lived in pairs. Each fish weighed about more than one kg.

(Hiếu) Int: Thấy con cá luôn hả?
Could you see the fish under the water?

Thấy con cá luôn, nó lên xuống rất đạn, mà cũng không ai bắt nó. Mình cũng không tìm, thời đó cá ở đây dữ lắm.
Yeah, sure you could see them swim up and down, but nobody caught them.

Int: Nếu không đủ lúa đi bắt cá được phải không?
If you hadn't had enough rice to eat, could you catch fish?

Thành ra bắt cá này cá kia ăn, dân lên đây đi tát cá. Người có bưng có bàu, nhưng mà do nông trường chiếm một thời gian, số dìa tui cũng lọt ở trỏng, tui cũng bỏ luôn. Cá hồi đó ở đây dữ.

So we caught the fish to eat. Peope cam ehere to catch fish. We had swamps, but then (Hoa An) farm got our swamps, I had had some swamps that belonged to the farm, too, but I abandoned them, too There were a lot of fish here.

Int: Trong thời ông nội ông ngòại có thay đổi nhiều lắm, là vì có những người đi dân trọng vùng này phải không?

In your grandfather's time, there were a lot of changes because there were a lot of immigrants in this region, wasn't it?

Thời ông ngọai tui chứng kiến thì vùng ở đây không có nhà, ví dụ chổ ở dằng này, ông Hội, dằng này ông ngọai tui, qua đây cất cái lẫm, nhưng cái nhà chính ở bên Rạch Gòi Cất cái lẫm để ở mần ruộng thôi thỉnh thỏang ... xa lắm mới có một cái nhà. Đây ra dầm Cả Cao, đếm chưa được mười cái nhà.

In my grandfther's time, as far as I know, there wren't houses here.For example, the village administrator lived here, my grandfther lived there, but that's not his house, my grand Dad's house was in Rạch Gòi He just made the hut here to stay when he was farming here.Houses were distant from each other. From here to Cả Cao there were about ten houses.
[419]

Int : Nhưng mà người làm ruộng ở đây nhưng có nhà chỗ khác?
The people did farming here but they had their houses in other places?

Làm ruộng ở đây nhưng nhà ở bên.....
Farming here but lived in...

Int : Rạch Gòị Mười mấy cây số?
Rạch Gòị More than ten kilometers?
20, ở Láng Hầm.
Twenty (km) , in Láng Hầm.

Int : Phải chèo ghe về buổi tối
Then you had to oar your boat home in the evening?

Thời đó là đi chèo không hà! Đi một buổi dường.
At that time we only traveled by boat ! It took us half a day to travel home

Int : Ví dụ buổi sáng đi làm ruộng chèo ghe từ đâu?
For example where did you start oaring your boat from in the morning ?

Cái đó là đi qua đây thì ổng có cất nhà, cất lẫm để lúa luôn.
Oh my grandDad came here and he made a hut or a small house to store the rice.

(Hiếu) Int: Cũng như có cái kho
Like a storage

Khi ở bển khởi công đi một buổi nhưng qua đây làm rồi vụ mới về.
It took half a day to travel here, but we didn't go back home till we finished the harvest.

(Hiếu) Int:Xong vụ là 4-6 tháng?
It was about 4 or 6 months long till the harvest was finished.

[432]

Xong vụ, đó tới mùa khô cũng vậy, qua đây đóng quân cứ mần rồi thu hoạch xong mới về, chớ đi về thì đâu có làm được vì thời gian đó đi chèo không thôi đi bộ.

Till finishing the harvest, we did the same in dry seasons, we stayed here and worked till the harvest finished, because if we had come back home, we couldn't have worked here, because at that time we just either traveled by boat or on foot.

Int : Thời gian làm xong vụ ở đây có thể vợ theo hay đi một mình?
During the time you worked here, could your wife accompany you or you just came here by yourself?

Đi qua bè bạn, vợ con chứ ... đâu phải đi một mình.
We came here with friend fellows, with wife and children... not a lone

Int : Đông người?
Many people?

Vì ổng qua đây làm cở 300 công đất này, thì nội một bầy bò bên đây phải mướn bạn bè không dưới 10 người Chung qui để làm thì một ngày thì 10 người sắp lên.

My grandad came here and worked on about 300 cong of land, he had to hire at least 10 people to plough with the buffaloes . Generally, he needed at least 10 people to finish the job in one day

Int : Trong thời đó người làm ruộng và xong vụ, ở đây buổi tối là đi bắt ếch bắt cá ở vùng này phải không?

At that time, the farmers could catch frogs and fish at night?

Hồi đó chưa biết ăn con ếch. Hồi tui còn nhỏ ếch leo vô tới hè, phóng vô có cặp mà cũng không ai ăn. Còn cá, hồi đó chê con rắn, con lươn cũng không ăn, chỉ ăn con cá, nhiều bà nói lươn nhớt.
At that time we didn't know that the frogs were edible. When I was small, frogs could jump into our houses, pairs by pairs, but nobody ate them. And fish, we just ate fish, we hated swamp-eels, and snakes; the women said that eels were slimy

(Hiếu) Int: Thời đó lươn rắn nhiều lắm?
At that time, were there lots of eels and snakes?

Lươn rắn hổng nói tới nữa! Dữ lắm! Hồi đó mấy người có ăn thì đi dặt chúm ... bắt một mớ ăn thôi không bán ra thị trường vì cũng không có giá. Bán ra thị trường cá lóc như cá trệ Cá trê vàng rất ngon! Không phải như cá trê bây giờ nó lại Con cá trê vàng nó cụt nướng mắm gừng là nhứt.

You couldn't count! So many! At that time, some people caught them . .. they just caught them to eat, they didn't sell them in the market because nobody bought them. They could just sell catfish only Yellow catfish were extremly delicious ! Unlike the yellow catfish nowadays which are half bred. The short, fat Yellow catfish could be " the number one" food in the world if you grilled them and ate them with white ginger fishsauce !

Còn con cá trê bây giờ nó lai hết rồi, có con dài nhằng. Còn con cá trê của người ta cụt ngủn hà. Ví dụ con cá chừng một gang thì có thể 6-7 con/1kg. Còn ghe go?i lại dếm cho người giăng câu, lưới, vó con cá có cái bội, cái bội của nó dương bằng cái lưới Miễn nó xúc vô là dính trên lưới rồi nó dếm. Mà lọt xuống lưới là thôi Có khi con cá gần cổ tay vầy mà lọt, cái lưới nó rất thưạ Nó xúc miễn trên lưới thì nó dếm, mà dưới thì không dếm. Ông già tui nói một thiên có một đồng mấy bạc, 100 con.

The Yellow catfish nowadays are all half-bred, they are tall, long. The real Yellowcatfish must be short and fat. For instance, six or seven Yellow catfish which were twenty centimeters long could weigh one kilogram. When the boats came to buy the fish from the fishermen, they had a net.They caught the fish with that hand net, and they just counted and paid for the ones which were stuck in the net, the ones which fell offthe net holes could not be paid. Sometimes, a fish which was as big as my wrist coulf fell off the net holes because the net was very sparsẹ They buyers scooped the fish and they just bought the fish which were in the net, they didn't buy the ones which fell off the net. My Dad said a hundred fish cost some cents only

Int : Cả vùng này từ Tổng Năng dến Nàng Mau là đất bỏ phải hông?
Was the whole region from Tổng Năng to Nàng Mau abandoned land?

Hồi trước thời tui là đất bỏ, ví dụ người bên đây làm không có dất, người ta lên đây, người ta khóet, chỗ nào gò, người ta lại chiếm, khóet, năm công, bảy công, người ta cấy Nhưng mà mấy năm đầu tiên bị Trích phá dữ lắm. Con Trích, nếu mình làm đồng đồng là nó xé, làm ít là chắc ăn.

Before my time it was abandoned land, for example the farmers didn't have land to do farming, they

came here to take the land to farm. However, in some first years, Trích [a kind of insects] destroyed the crops heavily The Trích like to destroy large, big pady rice, so to be sure , don't cultivate on big field.

(Hiếu) Int: Chắc là ruộng lúc đó không tốt?
I think that the fields at that time was not very good.

[500]

Không tốt.
No.

Hồi đó đất mấy vùng đó mấy người nghèo không có đất xuống khóet lỗ làm.
Just the poor people who didn't have land used that land.

(Hiếu) Int : Phèn nhiều, đất phèn nhưng cá lớn lắm. Đất phèn cá sống không sao
Lots of alum in the soil , but the fish were big. Fish could live well in alum areas.

Dộ phèn đất này cá sống nổi nhưng kỵ cái mùa Ví dụ trong mùa nước, từ tháng hai trở lại, con cá gom xuống dìa còn sống được, nếu xuống kinh quậy một số nổi, bị phèn còn bị chết nữa, xuống bưng nữa. Thành ra bị phèn chết nữa.

The fish could live in alum areas, but it depended on seasons. For example, in the water season from February, the fish could live in the lakes, but in swamps they were floating on the water, they died in magrove swamps, too. They also died of alum.

Phèn dồn lại ở mùa nắng. Mùa này sắp lên nếu mà không tát ao thỉnh thoảng nó cũng chết.
Alum accumulated in dry season. From this month of the year the fish could die if you didn't scoop up water in the ponds.
...

(Hiếu): Mùa nắng dộ phèn cao cá chết.
In sunny season, the increasing degree of alum kills the fish.

Int: Cháu xin hỏi về thay đổi thiên nhiên trong thời chống Pháp và chống Mỹ ...
Could I ask about the natural changes in the french time and American time?
[534]

Int : Thời kháng chiến đất này, cá, cây tràm và môi trường thay đổi như thế nào?
In the resistance time, how did the fish, the cajeputs, the land and the environment here changé

Thời kháng chiến cải cách nhiều lắm, vì số đất cung cấp cho dân, trong lúc đó dân cũng thưa thớt, bằng 1/3 (30%) dân bây giờ. Hồi đó lúc chưa dồn dân, năm 1959 là dân mới dồn cặp theo kinh Tổng Năng này Hồi chưa dồn thì kinh đó chỗ hai cây cầu này nè, Cầu Móng, Xẻo Trâm này chưa được mười cái nhà, cách chừng ba cây sộ

There were a lot of changes in the resistance time, like land was granted to the inhabitants, while there were not many people living here, just about 1/3 (30%) of the population now. At that time people didn't live together, till 1959, they got to live together along Tổng Năng canal. At that time, around this canal at these two bridges Cầu Móng and Xẻo Trâm there were fewer than ten houses , which were about 3 km apart from each other.

(Hiếu) Int: Hai bên luôn?
At both sides of the briges?
[552]

Cả hai bên luôn. Hồi đó dời riết dồn lại ở mới đặc hết trơn.
At both sides. Then people moved in and lived crowdedly here.

Int : Ai đào kinh này?
Who dug this canal?

Chế độ ông Tổng Năng. Ông Đứng dốc công thôi, nhưng tiền bạc của chánh phủ Pháp.
In Tổng Năng's time. He was the foreman, the manager only, but the money was supported by French government.

(Hiếu) Int: Vậy là đào trong thời Pháp?
So this canal was dug in French time?

Int : Đào lại trong thời Ngô Dình Diệm?
Was it dug again in Ngô Dình Diệm's time?

Không, trước lâu lắm. Thời này năm 1920 - 1930. Thời kinh tế tòan quyền, thời Moscu (Moscow) Thằng cha Bát Kê chết hồi năm 1939, qua năm 1940. Cái này làm trong thời kỳ trước thời kỳ đó. Thời kỳ đó không nói tới cách mạng. Thời đó chánh phủ Pháp dương quyền cai quản.

No, long before that. This time was in 1920-1930. It was the time of the Governor General Economy, it was in Moscow's time. [Basker?????] died in 1939, or 1940. This canal was made before that time. At that time people didn't talk about Revolution. This time was dominated by French government.

[570]

Int : Trong thời kháng chiến vùng này là vùng giải phóng phải không?
In the resistance time, was this region the liberal region?

Trong thời kháng chiến, thì tới năm Giải Phóng, Hồ Chủ Tịch ở Ba Dình, 2/9/1945, tuyên bố độc lập. Các tỉnh dều hưởng ứng. Còn quận của Long Mỹ là không có người làm chủ tịch quận. Phải có ông nào là Dảng viên của cộng sản mới được làm chủ tịch mà chọn không có một người Trong quận không có một người cộng sản. (năm 1945) Các nơi mới bổ túc xuống làm chủ tịch quận.

In the resistance time, in the year of Liberation, President Hồ declared the independence in Ba Dình on September 2nd, 1945. Every province responded that. Long Mỹ didtrict didn't have the chairman because there was no member of Communist Party in Long Mỹ in 1945. Then other places sent a person to Long Mỹ to be the chairman of the district.

Int: Vùng này trong thời chống Pháp là Việt Minh hết?
Were all people Việt Minh in the French time here?

[595]

Thời chống Pháp mấy chợ quận như Long Mỹ có dồn Pháp. Dài kinh Lái Hiếu, xuống ngã tư, ngã bảy,

chơ quận cũng có dồn Pháp. Nhưng mà kinh xáng mấy chục cây số chỉ có hai, ba cái dồn không có nhiệu

In the French time, there were French army stations at the district markets like Long Mỹ market. Along Lái Hiếu canal, down to the intersections and the markets, there also were French army stations. However there only were two or there French army stations along the canal.

[607]

Int : Còn kinh Tổng Năng cũng có?
Were there at Tổng Năng canal?

Cái này hồi trước theo dúng là có dồn mà thời Pháp không có dồn. Dồn ở Long Mỹ. Vô tới đây Kinh Cùng cũng chưa có dồn. Cầu Xáng mới có dồn (khỏi chợ Kinh Cùng). Rạch Gòi, Cái Tắc có dồn. Rồi ra Cần Thơ (thời năm 1945-1946)

There should have been. However, there wasn't. There were stations in Long Mỹ. There wasn't any in Kinh Cùng. There was a station at Cầu Xáng (out of Kinh Cùng market). There were sations in Rạch Gòi, Cái Tắc and Cần Thơ (in 1945-1946).

Int : Còn về việc sử dụng dất, môi trường trong thời đó?
How about using land and environment at that time?

Trong thời đó mấy ông này tổ chức (thời 9 năm) kháng chiến dân quân du kích, nhân dân tự vệ thì làm việc tổ chức với nhau lên làm xã làm ấp, mới phát triển ra cắt đất này cấp cho dân.
In the " nine-year time", they organized resistances, annd organized Wards and Villages, then gave land to the inhabitants.

[632]

Int: Sau khi cấp dất, dân trồng lúa và ủng hộ kháng chiến?
After being granted land, people grew rice and helped the resistance?

Ừ. Cấp cho dân để đóng thuế nông nghiệp nhà nước thụ
Yeah, granting land to people and people paid agricultural tax to te goverrnent.

Mặt B

Int: Về đất "bỏ hoang"...
About abandoned land...

[006]

[subject misunderstand question and replies about "public land", not "barren land"]

Đất thời đó được bỏ vào công điền (điền là dất). Đất được bỏ vào công quỹ chứ không phải là dân chiếm. Công điền công thổ trong thời gian kháng chiến, chứ không mở mang. Nhưng trong này thỉnh thỏang có số người xin chiếm làm, miễn mình có tiền có vốn, lại đó xin người ta mở dất. Trong dất bỏ mấy ổng cho hết, vì mình làm đóng thuế mà. Nhưng mà mấy ổng có lệnh tha thuế ba năm nếu mình chịu làm.

Land was contributed to public land. People didn't possess land privately People didn't own land in the resistance time. Some people who had money could ask for widening land for farming. It was acceptable, because we could pay tax. However, tax was forgiven in 3 years if we aggreed to use land.

(Hiếu) Int: Hỏi cây bự hồi chiến tranh có bị bom hay bị ăn cắp?
Were the big trees in the war killed by bomb or stolen?

Một số bị bom, một số bị người ta dốn xài Vùng mặt trận bị bom càn hư, nhưng số nhiều là do dân xài
Some were killed by bombs, some were cut down for wood. The ones at the battle front were killed by bombs, but most of them were cut down by people

Int : Nghĩa là những cây to trong vùng này, dất, nước...nước bị hư hay tiếp tục nước ngọt?
That meas the big trees in this region . .. and .. . land , water. .. was the water spoiled or it kept fresh?

Cái vùng đất ông nói thuộc về thiên nhiên. Tui biết ở đâu tui nói ở đó. Hồi trước nó có khoanh cái ộ Ví dụ trong Tỉnh Cần thơ có ranh giới : Tỉnh Rạch Giá, vùng này hồi trước thuộc về Rạch Giá, Huyện Long Mỹ. Thành ra nó có phân tách hai vùng : Tỉnh Cần thơ thì đất tốt phì nhiêu phèn ít. Cũng có chỗ có phèn nhưng độ phèn nhẹ hơn Rạch Giá. Vùng này độ phèn nặng thành thử đất phèn, dân ít, đất rộng, thành ra dân chiếm chỗ nào có ăn thì làm, không có ăn nó đỡ nhà bỏ đi chổ khác. Vì đất rộng thưa ai muốn ở đâu thì ở. Nhưng lại ở thì dăng ký ở dịa phương mình xin với nhà "le court" [unclear] hoặc giả dăng ky ở xã ấp.

The land you mentioned was natural land. I could tell you as much as I know. It was mapped before. For example, part of Can Tho now belonged to Rach Gia before.This place (Long My) belonged to Rach Giạ It divided into 2 parts: in Can Tho the land was good, rich, and contained little alum. Sometimes it had alum, but not as much as the land in Rach Gia did. This place (which belonged to Rach Gia) a too much alum in the soild, so not many people lived here, the land was barren. Therefore, people came here to try farming, if the farming was positive, thy stayed, if not, they left. Because of huge empty land, people could live whereever they wanted tọ However, if they wanted to live somewhere, they had to register and fulfill the paper work at the court or at the village administration office.

(Hiếu) Int: Thời đó chổ này cây cá rắn rùa nhiều
At that tiem were there lots of trees and fish and snakes here?
034

Cái đó có rất nhiều nhưng nằm ở vùng sông rạch, còn đất ở trên ở chổ ăn uống được thì có mà ít, nhưng nó rút lại chổ môi sinh nó sống được rất nhiệu

Lots, but they lived mostly in the wet palces and rivers, not many on the land; they lived at the environment that was good for them.

(Hiếu) Int: Lúc đó đất ở đây thấp dầm lầy
At that time, was the land here very low?

Thấp, vùng bên đó thấp hơn bên này vùng bên này cao hơn.
Low, here it was higher than there.

(Hiếu) Int: Sau này lượng cây đó mình trồng lại được không?

After that, could we grow those trees again?

Nếu có thì môi sinh của lòai cây cũng như lòai cá, cũng như dòng Sao, từ Cầu Móng đến Vĩnh Tường. Nhưng dòng Sao bây giờ nó có dường vầy nè, nó ăn ở trỏng nó có dường lạch. Cây Sao nó sống và những cây phụ cận như Bí Bái, Tai Mang, Dái Ngựa, sống được thì sống.

The living environment of trees is similar to that of fish, like Sao trees, from Cau Mong to Vinh Tuong. However Sao nowadays has a path inside the trunk. Sao lived with Bí Bái, Tai Mang, Dái Ngựa.

(Hiếu) Int: Sau này do dân dốn hết?
Then did the local people destroy them?'

Ừ ... dân phá hết, ví dụ người ta chiếm ở đây thì phá vùng này Tui chiếm thì tui phá. Phá dặng tui khai thác. Hồi trào Pháp làng có dộng viên mình vô khai thác, lúc đó không có cần tiền bạc gì mua hết, mình khẩn nếu mình thấy đất tốt . Như ông ngọai tui thấy đất này tốt thì vô đây khẩn. Nó cho quyền mỗi công dân được 10 mẫu Ông tới ba mươi mấy mẫu lận. Mỗi người con cháu Đứng 10 mẫu thì cho, còn một người khẩn 30, 40 mẫu nó không cho.

Yeah, they destroyed them all, for example they took the land here, they destroyed the trees here. I took this land, I destroyed trees for my farming. In the French time, they encouraged us to clear the land, we didn't need money to buy land at all, we could live there if we found the land good for us. Like my Mom's father, he found this land good for him, he came and stayed here. The guys [French authorities] gave each person ten mẫu. My grandfather had more than 30 mẫu. It is acceptable that every member in the family be responsible for 10 mẫu, but it was not accepted if one member in the family had 30, 40 mẫu.
[Repeats]

[060]

Int : Trong khi đó có người đi dân trừ chỗ khác tới đây phải không?
Were there immigrants from other places?

Hầu hết nguyên vùng Rạch Giá không có người ở dây Tòan là ở Vĩnh Long. Còn Ông ngọai tui ở Sa déc, Ông Nội ở Bồ Húc. Ông cố có ông nội, ông Năm, ông Tám là ba người con dẫn xuống đây. Trong thời đó xứ này là rừng, không có đất không người ở.

In the whole region of Rach Gia, there were not local people. Mostly from Vinh Long. My Mom's father was from Sa Dec (Đong Thap) and my Dad's father was from Bo Huc. My great grandfather brought here 3 sons : my grand father, his brothers Năm, and Tám. It was jungles at that time, no people living.

(Hiếu) Int: Hồi trào Pháp?
In French time?

(not answering the question)

Tòan là những người ở trên đưa xuống dây

All people were from up there.

(Hiếu) Int: Nếu đi xuống đây mà làm không tốt thì đi chuyển sang nơi khác?
Could they move to another place if the farming was not good here?

[070]

Ừ ... nếu mình sống ở đây không được anh em rủ chổ nào làm ăn được thì cứ đi.

Yeah... if we could not stay here, and if friends invited us to go with them to find a better place, we could go.

[072]

Chỗ này là khai thác?
Was this the cleared land?

Chỗ này tòan đất khai thác không hà.
All was cleared land.

Cháu dang nghiên cứu về những thay đổi kinh rạch nhưng chỉ dọc những tài liệu trong thư viện, nhưng rất khó hiểu kinh nghiệm của người về những thay đổi thiên nhiên...cảm ơn qúy Ông.

I'm doing reseach about the changes of the canals here but I have just read from the documents in the libraries, and I find it not easy to understand clearly the human's experience of the changes of the nature ... Thank you, Sir.

Interview 5
Mr. Tự
April 13, 2002
Phương Bình Commune
Phụng Hiệp District

Tôi tên --- --- Tự...sinh năm 1939...ở Ấp Phương Qưới C

My name is --- --- Tự... I was born in 1939 .. . I'm from Phương Qưới Ward, Phương Bình Commune, Phụng Hiệp

[010]

Int: Về gia dình...
Could you tell about your family

Nội ngọai ở vùng trên : Cái Bè...Khi ba xuống đây là 2..3 tuổi.
My grandparents traveled here from the upper region: Cái Bè [Cái Bè, Tien Giang -Translator]

Int: Ông Nội kể lại về hồi xưả
Did your grandfather tell you about the old time?

Ngày xưa đây là rừng, dân vùng trên xuống lập nghiệp. Có Tràm nhiều Kính Xáng này múc trước cha tôi (cha ngòai 100 tuổi)
This region was jungles, then people from the upper parts came here to start their life here.

Sau này đào đất gặp gốc Tràm + dái ngựa.

Then when we dug up the land here, we found the roots and the feet of cajeputs and dái ngựa (Swietenia macrophylla - rosewood).

Thời ông nội chưa có kinh Xáng Lái Hiếu, có Rạch Cũ, Kinh Trời Xanh, Tượng, Cọp lội thành kinh rạch từ đây tới Rạch Dứa.

In my grandfather's time, there was not Lái Hiếu canal, but there existed Rạch Cũ, Trời Xanh canals which were formed by elephants and tigers, from here to Rạch Dứa.

[037]

Kinh Xáng này trên 100 năm, Pháp múc. Ngày xưa địa chủ, nhà giàu ở dưới Rạch Cũ, ở bờ

Xáng này ít nhà (tá điền ở).

This canal is more than a hundred years old, dug by the French. At that time the landlords and the rich lived down at Rạch Cũ, a long the shore. Around this canal, there were few tenants living.

[045]

Int : Ông nội ở Rạch Cũ?
Did your grandfather live at Rạch Cũ?

Không có. Cha tui (ông già tui hồi đó ở đây).
No, my Dad was living here.

Int: Tại sao gọi là Cái Sơn?
Why was it called Cái Sơn?

Pháp dặt tên, với mấy ông già thời xưa vì có rạch Cả Sơn, Xáng Cụt ăn qua chợ.
The Frech government and some old people named it because there were Cả Sơn and Xáng Cụt [Short canal- Translator] going through the market.

(Hiếu): Không có tên nào khác?
Was there any other name?

Int: Phương Binh bắt đầu khi nào?
When did Phương Binh start?

Hồi trước nó thuộc về Tỉnh Sóc Trăng, sau là Rạch Giá, sau này là Cần Thợ Rồi qua phong trào quốc gia, mình thuộc tỉnh Phong Dinh sau nữa. Lúc làm khu trù mật ở Vị Thanh, mình là Tỉnh Chương Thiện. Hồi trào Pháp ở đây là Rạch Giá, Sóc Trăng . Thời Việt minh vẫn còn là của Sóc Trăng.

It had belonged to Sóc Trăng before it belonged to Rạch Giá, then it belonged to Cần Thợ In the national movement, it belonged to Phong Dinh [the old name of Can Tho- Translator]. At the time the dense campus was built in Vị Thanh, this region was called Chương Thiện province.In the French time, this region belonged to Rạch Giá, Sóc Trang. In Viet Minh time, it still belonged to Sóc Trăng.

[064]

Int: Trước đào kinh Lái Hiếu là rừng không?
Was it all jungles before Lái Hiếu canal was dug?

Ừ ... rừng, phèn nhiều, chưa làm ruộng.
Yeah . .. jungles, lots of alum, not doing farming yet.

Int: Rừng cháy năm nào?
In what year were the jungles on fire?

[interviewer misunderstands "chay" (to burn) and "don" (to cut)]

Không biết...Thời kinh Lái Hiếu, chưa cắt rừng.
I don't know. At the time making Lái Hiếu canal, jungles were not cut yet.

[084]

(Hiếu) Int: Khi bác nhỏ còn rừng?
When you were small, were the jungles still there?

Không, chỉ là vườn tạp thôi, vườn cây ăn trái, sau này tời thời 59, dân đi hết. (trào Mỹ đi dân). Từ ... 75 tới nay trồng cây lại
No, just gardens, fruit gardens, after that in 1959, people moved all. (at the time the American government started the immigration). Trees have just been gorwn again since 1975.

Int: Thời Bác nhỏ đất căn cứ là đất Bà Bái
When you were young, Viet minh region was at Bà Bái

Bà Bái già lắm, gần 150 tuổi. Thời Pháp.
Ms. Bái is very old , nearly 150 years old. She lived in French time.

(Hiếu) Int: Tại sao gọi là kinh Bà Bái
Why was it called Ms. Bái canal?

[096]

Vì Bả đào kinh này, đất của bả. Ở đây có nhiều kinh như kinh Chủ Ba, sau này sửa lại thành Kinh Giải Phóng, Kinh Trâm Bầu Hồi đó ví dụ như đất tui tui dào, tui lấy tên tuị Ví dụ như kinh Ba Tự. Ông chủ này ông chủ kia Mình đào kinh đặt tên mình.

Because she made this canal on her land. There were many canals here like Landlord Ba canal which was called Liberation canal then, and there also was Trâm Bầu canal. At that time people named the canals after their names if they dug the canals on their land, for example: Ba Tự canal, this landlord, that landlord... We could name them after our names.

Int: Trong thời Pháp thuộc có nhiều địa chủ lớn? Trong thời đó một người địa chủ đào kinh và đặt tên người đó, thời đó có kinh Bà Bái.....?
In the French time, were there many rich landlords? At that time the landlords could dig canals and used their names to name the canals, and Bà Bái canal was at that time?

Kinh Qủan Cự, Kinh Ông Nhiệm, Kinh Bà Chủ Bạ
Like Qủan Cự canal , Mr. Nhiệm canal, Bà Chủ Ba canal.

[110]

... Bả là người Việt nam nhưng lấy quốc tịch Pháp, nên là người Pháp, lấy tên Pháp, làm địa chủ theo kiểu Pháp. Còn người dân thì mướn đất làm không được làm địa chủ. Ví dụ như hồi đó chú là địa chủ tui là dân tui phải mướn đất làm. Đất hồi đó không có manh múng vầy, tới phong trào Việt minh mới cấp đất cho dân cày

Landlady Ba was Vietnamese but she had French nationality, so she was French, and had French Name; she also managed her land in French way And the inhabitants could rent her land only, could not buy or own any land. For example, you were land lord, I was an inhabitant; and I rented your land to work. At that time, land had not been divided into such small, it was only granted like that to farmers in Viet Minh time.

...

Int : Trước Việt Minh cấp dất, nếu dân thuê đất phải trả cho địa chủ bao nhiêu % của vụ?
Before Viet Minh granted land to farmers, how many percents of the harvest the farmers had to pay as renting fee to the landords?

Một công 4...5 giạ. Còn dư lại của mình. Hồi đó một công được mười mấy giạ lúa hà, không như bây giờ, hồi đó đâu có phân bón. Hồi đó làm lúa mùa, một vụ 6 tháng, một năm một vụ. Ngòai thời gian đó bỏ đất hoang dân đi làm mướn, hoặc nếu vùng cao thì trồng mía, khổ hoa, khoai lang.
Four or five gia out of one cong. At that ime one cong gave about ten gia, unlike nowadays, because

at that time we didn't have fertilizers. At that time we grew season rice, 6 month crop, one crop per year. During the other 6 months of the year, we abandoned land and went to get some hiring job from the landlords, or we could grow some sugar cane or bitter melon, or batata and weet potatoes on some higher land.

(Hiếu) Int: Vùng Phương Bình bắt đầu trồng lúa khi nào?
When did people in Phuong Binh start to grow rice?

Từ hồi 9 năm tới giờ. Trồng mía tây (bên ngòai màu vàng), mía đường (ngòai màu đỏ đỏ) {Hiếu}
Since nine year time (Resistance time). They grew western sugarcane (yellow peels) , and sugary sugarcane (red peels)
[146]

Int : Từ lâu ở đây có mía tây trong đất hoang? Hồi đó là vùng cao trồng vùng ruộng thì làm ruộng
Was western sugar cane existing in the abandoned land long ago? At that time you grew sugarcane on higher land and rice in the filed?
[Interviewer misunderstands trong and trồng]

Int : Trước kháng chiến vùng này có mía và nhà máy mía không?
Before the Resistance time, were there sugar canes and sugar cane factories here?

Có mía nhứng không có nhà máy mía chỉ có lò dường. Ep bằng trâu và bằng tay, kéo chạy vòng vòng hai ba người dẩy
Yes, there was sugar canes but no sugar factory. We squeezed sugar cane by buffaloes and by hand, we pulled it a round.
[160]

Trâu nông dân nuôi không rõ gốc gác.
The buffaloes were raised by the farmers and we didn't know their origin.

Int: Người dân buôn bán tập trung ra vùng nào? Cần Thơ, Sóc Trăng hay Long Mỹ?
Where did people go to sell and buy products? Cần Thơ, Sóc Trăng or Long Mỹ?

Thường ra Phụng Hiệp, Kinh Cùng. Giờ có chợ Cả Sơn, mua dồ ít ít xài ở đây hoặc Long Mỹ, khi nào cần thì đi Cần thơ, Phụng Hiệp.
Often at Phụng Hiệp, Kinh Cùng. Now at Cả Sơn market, we could buy casual stuffs here or in Long My, we go to Can Tho, Phụng Hiệp when necessary

Int : Dồn Pháp trên kinh Lái Hiếu ?
Was there any French army station at Lái Hiếu canal?

Ở chỗ trường học bây giờ, có bót Tây
Yes, at the school now.

Int : Dồn trên bờ kinh này?
Was the station on the canal's edge

Ừ
yeah

[179]

Int: Người dân có sợ không?
Were the inhabitants afraid of them?

Tây chỉ bắt lính, bắt xâu, xâu cao thuế nặng chứ cũng không có gì nên dân cũng bình thường. Nhưng từ hồi mình bắt đầu chống Pháp, thì nó làm khó. Nó bắt Việt minh điều tra đánh đập.

The French guys just arrested people and forced them to join the army, they had people pay high and heavy tax, so the people could stand them and thought that was normal.

[186 ..194]

Int : năm 52..53 Cần thơ có 50%...60% diện tích là Việt minh cấp. Vậy vùng Kinh Lái Hiếu có một vai trò gì trong thời đó?
In 1952, 1953 , 50% or 60% of Can Tho was granted by Viet minh, so what was the role of Lái Hiếu canal then?

Tàu Pháp từ Long Mỹ vô đây, ra Phụng Hiệp. Thông thương dường sông. Sau tới năm 47..48. Việt minh nổi lên nó mới đi tập trung mười mấy hai ba chục tàu Pháp đi càn kiếm Việt minh đánh.
French boats came here from Long My and went out to Long My Trading by waterway Then in 47, 48, when Viet Minh rebeled, the guys [the French] gathered and 20, or 30 boats went together to look for Viet Minh to fight.

Int : Từ thời chống Pháp sang chống Mỹ có đào kinh mới không?
From the French time to the American time, did people dig new canals?

Hồi chống Pháp và Mỹ dều có đào kinh. Thời Pháp đào kinh để chạy vào đồng ruộng và để làm ruộng. Thời Mỹ cũng đào kinh để đi, vì dồn bót nó chận các dường hết, mình không chuyển dồ được. Dân phải đào con kinh khác dị
People dug canlas in both French time and American time. In the French time, canals were dug to help farming. In the American time, canals were dug to help traveling, because the American stations were stuck in our way, we couldn't transport at all. We had to dig other canals to travel.

Int : Nhà nước không lo, dân phải tự lò
Didn't the government sponsor for that but the inhabitants had to do by themselves?

Dân tự đào bằng tay, đâu có máy móc. Ví dụ biểu mấy thằng thanh niên, kêu gọi người ta tự nguyện tự giác đi dào
We had to dig canals by hands without machines. We called up young men to dig canals.

[215]

Int : Những năm 60 có sử dụng những máy bơm nước không?
Were water pumps used in the 1960s?

Có, Kohler, nhưng máy nhỏ.
Yes, we used Kohler , but the small kind.

[223]

Không chống lụt được chỉ chống hạn thôi, đào kinh.
Diging canals couldn't help prevent flood but drought.

Int : Lụt khác với ngày nay
Were the floods different with those nowadays?

Nếu có lụt thì chịu nhưng mức nước không cao bằng ngày nay Nước ít hơn.
We suffered floods when they came, but the water levels were not this high.

Int : Tại sao
Why?

[Neighbor interrupts] Lũ hồi đó tự nhiên, mặt lũ bằng nhau, vì không ai chống hết, lũ rải đều ra, còn bây giờ vùng này chống lũ, nghĩa là vùng này không cho nước tràn ra thì bắt buộc nước phải tràn ra chỗ khác.
At that time, the floods were natural, the water levels were similar, nobody prevented them, they spread equally, but now this region prevent floods, that means water is not allowed to come in this region, as a result, the water must go to another region.
...

Lũ thời đó kéo dài từ tháng 9 đến rằm tháng 10 thì nước giựt.
Floods at that time was from the ninth month of lunar year to the full moon of the tenth month.

[251]

Int : Thủy nông và lúa có thay đổi gì từ thời ông còn nhỏ đến nay
Since you were small, how have irrigation and rice changed ?

Từ tiếp thu đến giờ thay đổi nhiều lắm : giống lúa, máy móc, phương tiện. Ví dụ làm lúa xạ hàng, phân bón, sâu bọ.... ngày đó không có sâu bọ từ khi dùng thuốc tới giờ có sâu bọ nhiều Lúa thóc thì bây giờ trúng hơn, hồi đó chỉ cày bằng trâu
There have been lots of changes since 1975: rice seeds, machinery, equipment. For instance, using fertilizers in growing rice, insects appear... There were not insects before, but since we used fertilizers and pesticides, they have appeared a lot. Nowadays, harvests are much better while in the past we just floughed by buffaloes.

[263]

Int: Ông có thể so sánh môi trường xưa và nay
Could you compare the environment in the past with that nowadays?

Thời xưa ra ruộng uống nước được, thọc đầu xuống uống hoặc lấy nón lá múc uống. Bây giờ ra ruộng uống kiểu đó là chết. Dời sống bây giờ tốt hơn nhưng môi trường ô nhiễm nhiều hơn
In the past you could drink the water in the field, just put your head on the water and drank it, or you could use your hat to take water from the field, then drink it. However, nowadays if you did like that, you could die. Life is better but the environment is much more polutted.

[285...297]

Int : Tác động lớn nhất đối với môi trường nước và sinh thái?
What is the biggest effect to the water environment and the ecology?

[Rephrase Question...]

[312]

Int : Về vấn đề qủan lý nước. Ví dụ chống lụt. Cá ruộng cá thiên nhiên trong nước dang thay đổi như thế nào?
About managing water, preventing floods , for example How are the filed fish and natural fish changing?

Dân càng ngày càng phát triển, dân bắt cá ăn càng ngày càng nhiều, hoặc xịt thuốc sâu cá chết, nước cạn, nước ô nhiễm làm cá chết, kiệt quệ.
People keep developing, the more they know, the more fish they catch for food, or they use pesticides, and the fish die, the fish also die of polutted water.

[322]

(Hiếu) Int: Lợi và hại của việc đào kinh nhỏ?
What are the disadvantages and disadvantages of digging small canals?

Đào kinh dễ lấy nước nhờ khuôn bao khép kín, chống lũ được, đào kinh nhiều hao đất nhưng nó rút được phèn, giup cấy, lên liếp.
Digging canals helps get water, prevent floods, lessen alum, ease rowing, making raised beds, though it wastes land, toọ

Ngày xưa dân thưa cả ngàn thước mới có mười mấy cái nhà, bây giờ kẹo hết, dân tăng.
In the past, there werenot many people, there just were more than ten failies living in about a thousand metres. Now, so many

Kinh này đào lâu rồi, ông già tui 100 ngòai tuổi còn chưa biết nhiều về kinh này, tui mới có sáu mươi mấy làm sao biết hết?
This canl was dug long ago, even my father who more than a hundred years old could not know much about this canal, while I'm just more than sixty, how can I know?

[358]

Thời Mỹ dánh vùng này dữ lắm, bom đạn đi bố ở chỗ khác, còn dư về trút xuống vùng này
Từ 1959 ....1964 ở đây nhiều người
Từ 1964 ....1975 dân đi hết vì bom đạn dồn bót dày đặc.
In the American time, they bombed here a lot. After bombing in other places, they came here and dropped all the bombs left in the day here.
From 1959 to 1964 there were a lot of people living here.
From 1964 to 1975 they moved all because of terrible bombs and army stations.

Interview 6
Ông Dang
April 19, 2002
Hoá Lựu Commune
Vị Thanh District

[012]

Đất dai vùng ngòai này hồi xưa trống trải, nhưng vùng chỗ tui ở bây giờ là còn rừng. Ông ngọai tui mua đất đó còn rừng.
This region used to be barren land, but the place where I'm living now was jungles. It was jungles at the time my grandfather bought it.

[015]

Int : Trong rừng có cây nào?
What kinds of trees were there in the jungles?

Rừng Tràm nhưng sau đó Hoa kiều phá làm rẫy Hồi đó vùng đó chưa làm ruộng, chỉ làm rẫy thôị Vì đất rừng mới phá, người ta chỉ làm rẫy Sau này mới có làm ruộng.

Cajeputs, but then the Chinese people destroyed them to do swidden agriculture. At that time, we hadn't grown rice and hadn't had fields, there was only swidden. Because the land was jungle, so people just could clear and burn. After that we had fields.

[020]

Int : Làm ruộng từ năm nào?
When did people start to make the fileds and grow rice?

Từ '45 trước khi phân nửa phía ngòai này trống, phân nửa sông cái bên kia dân thưa ít, một cây số chừng 4.. 5 cái nhà, không có dường bộ, từ đây đi đó chỉ đi lòn trong rẫy nên mới thành dường lộ. Từ năm 47 có dường lộ liền nhau, trước kia dứt khúc.

Before 1945, when this half still was barren land, and on that half (at the river), there were just few people living, there were just 4 or 5 houses in a kilometer; there was no street; people used the paths inside the kaingins as streets. Since 1947, there were connected streets, but before that the streets were chopping.

[về giao thông...] About transportation

Người ta cũng đi bằng dường thủy, đi bằng ghẹ Từ Xà No tới đây không có dường di, chỉ đi bằng rạch Cái Su (bên sông cái nước dục) dổ lại cầu Cái Sình dổ rạ

People traveled by boat. There was no street from Xa No to here, so people used Cai Su arroyo through Cai Sinh bridge as a travel route.

Từ Cái Su ra vườn Cò (thời Pháp có nhiều Cò) ra Cái Sình (đi vòng không có đường tắt)

From Cái Su, you could go straight to Stork garden (There were a lot of Stork in the French time) then to Cai Sinh (You had to make one round, because there was no short cut)

[042]

Dưới đó là một dường. Dưới này là Rạch Hóc Hỏa, dổ ra khỏi Cầu Dúc (Cả Tư) mới qua đây được. Còn dường ngang qua đây chỉ đi bộ, đi dường đồng thôi chứ ghe cộ không vận chuyển qua đây được, phải đi vòng. Lúc đó đất chưa thành khỏanh, ai thích gì làm nấy Hồi đó cha mẹ tui làm rẫy

There was a road down there.Down here, Hoc Hoa arroyo flowed out to Duc bridge (Cai Tu) the ran in here.And this way we could only travel overland, over field, boats couldn't travel this way At that time, the land was free, everyone could grow anything he wanted. At that time my parents were gardening.

Chúng tui ở vùng sát với sông Cả Tư, vùng đất này mới khai mở sau, làm rẫy dến khi đất cỗi rồi mới trở lại làm ruộng. Thời nhỏ tới lớn tui thấy làm rẫy, chưa làm ruộng. Làm rẫy là trồng hoa màu, khoai củ.... Làm rẫy trên liếp rất trúng vì đất mới Một công khoai lang được 50..70 tạ (1tạ = 60kg) (người ta tính ra tạ khác nhau ở từng vùng). Ở vùng này 1 tạ = 60kg, An giang 1tạ=78kg, Miền Bắc 1tạ=78kg. Vì đơn vị tạ không đồng dều nhau ở từng vùng khác nhau nên người ta bây giờ dùng kg và tấn.

We lived near Ca Tu river, this region was cleared later, we gardened till the land became stunted, then we went back to field work. I started gardening since I was small, I didn't do any field work. Gardening means we grow fruits and grains. In new soil, raised beds helped a lot. One cong of sweet potatoes coould give 50 to 70 tạ (1tạ = 60kg) (people count tạ differently in diferrent regions). In this region , 1 tạ = 60kg, in An giang 1tạ=78kg, in the North 1tạ=78kg. Because tạ is counted diffrently, so people use kilogram and ton.

Int : Tại sao tạ ở An giang khác tạ ở Hỏa Lựủ
Why is tạ in Angiang different from tạ in Hoa Luủ

Không biết.
I don't know.

Ví dụ : như người ta dùng dơn vị chục cũng khác. Ví dụ một chục bắp ở vùng này 14 trái nhưng ở An giang, Đồng Tháp 1 chục 20 trái [ở Rạch giá 1 chục 16 trái]
For example, people also use chục (a ten) diffrently One chục of corn in this region could count 14, but in Angiang or Đong Thap one chục could be 20, in Rach Gia one chục is 16.

[079]

Int: Lúc ông nhỏ, cha mẹ làm rẫy vì thời đó nước mặn nhiều
When you were small, did your parents garden because the water was so salty?

Lúc đó nửa năm nước mặn, nửa năm nước ngọt.
At that time, the water was fresh half a year, and it was salty during the other half.

[080]

Int : Trong lúc nước mặn làm gì?
What did you do when the water was in the salty season?

Để Đại vậy không tưới, không làm gì.
We left the trees there, we didn't water them at all.

Int : Đi chỗ khác?
Did you have to move to another place?

Cũng ở đó thôị
We just stayed there.

[Hiếu]Int: Lúc nước mặn làm saỏ
How was it when the water was salty?

Cũng để đó, cũng làm rẫy nhưng không lấy nước tưới, đất vẫn còn êm, rễ ăn sâu xuống, cây vẫn sống nhưng không nhằm mùa chính không thu hoạch lớn được.
We were still gardening, but we didn't water the trees, the soil was fallow, and the roots went deep down in the soil, so the trees were still alive. However we couldn't have a good harvest.

[086]

Hiếu Int: Trồng khóm?
Did you grow pineapples?

Trồng khóm là sau nàỵ
Pineapples have just been grown recently

Int : Thời đó có rừng Tràm?
Were there cajeput jungles at that time?

Tràm lúc đó thưa thớt, gọi là rừng đây, tức là còn từng chòm, từng khóm hoặc thưa thưa cây.
There were not many cajeputs at that itme, people called them "string jungles", which meant "thin jungles".

Int : Có nuôi ong làm mật không?
Did people grow bees for honeỷ

Không
No.

Int : Trong thời nước mặn có bị lũ không?
Were there any floods during the salty water periods?

Từ 10 năm trở lại đây nước cạo Trước kia ít nước ngập lắm, nước không tràn qua bờ. Nước bây giờ cao hơn hồi xưa cả thước so với nước tột đỉnh.

The water levels have been higher in the past ten years. We didn't have floods before, the water couldn't run over the banks. The water levels nowadays are about a meter higher than the highest levels in the past.

[099]

Thủy triều hồi xưa như thế nào? So với nay thay đổi như thế nào?
What was the tide in the past like? How does it compare to those of today?

Cũng có lớn, ròng. Nhưng nước trong mùa (mùa lũ) không lên như bây giờ. So với trước nước bây giờ cao hơn 1 thước trở lên. Hồi trước mặc dù bờ, cõi sơ sịa như vậy nhưng người ta vẫn troăng đưa được, không ngập, nhưng bây giờ tui thấy sức người chống với thiên nhiên không nổi. Bây giờ yêu cầu có nhà nước tiếp (help) mới làm Xáng cạp, bờ bao chớ sức người chống thiên nhiên không nổi.

Sometime the tide was high, sometimes it ebbed down. But the flood water was not as high as that nowadays. The water nowadays is one or more meter higher. In the past, though the banks and shores were simple, people could grow watermelon and it would not flood. However now I think that human beings cannot defeat nature. Now we need help from the government to make dikes and canals.

[109]

Int : Nghe nói hồi xưa miền Hậu Giang thủy triều thay đổi nhiều lắm trong một ngày Mùa khô thay đổi khỏang 1,5m. Người đi ghe rất dễ vì đi 1 hướng và triều xuống đi trở lại Vùng này thủy triều có làm giao thông dễ hơn không?

It was said that in the past in Hau Giang the tides were changeable during the day. They change about 1.5 m in dry season. People could travel easily by boat because they just went in one direction and when the tides ebbed down, they traveled back home. Did the tides make transportation easier?

Ở đây mùa lũ ở An Giang nước dồ xiết xuống hòai chớ không chảy trở lại Còn bây giờ nước lớn nước ròng. Tức là nước lớn nó chảy vô, nước ròng nó chảy rạ
Here in the flood season, the floods from Angiang flowed heavily down without running back at all. But now it depends on high tides or ebb tides. That means when the tides are high, the floods flow in, when the tides ebb, the floods flow out.

Int : Mỗi ngày?
Everyday?

Con nước ở đây cũng bất thần (changeable) có khi 1 ngày 2 ..3 con nước không chừng do thủy triều biến động.
The water here is changeable (one or two times a day) depending on the tides.

[The interviewer misunderstands, he mess up "changeable" (biến dộng) with "ocean" (*Biển Dông*)]/

[120]

Int : Ở đây thủy triều biển Đông hay biển Tây?
The tides here came from East Sea or West Sea?

Thuộc biển Tây Từ đây ra đó tính theo dường chim bay khỏang 100 ngòai.200 cây số (ra tới cửa biển). Vì sông rạch của mình nhiều, tính cong vậy chứ nếu tính ngay thì không bao xa.

They belonged to the west sea. It is about a hundred or two hundred kilometers (as the bird flies) from here to the sea gate. Because we have so many rivers we have to measure according to the curved route, but if we measure according to the straight route, it is not that far.

[123]

Int : Thời ông còn nhỏ, có biết về kinh Xà No không?
When a child, did you know much about XaNo canal?

Lúc tui lớn lên dã có rồi Nó nằm trong thời Pháp cai trị Việt nam.
It was in the time the French dominated Viet nam.

[129]

Int : Thời Pháp vùng này có địa chủ lớn không?
In French time, were there rich landlords?

Có một địa chủ lớn. Còn lại nhỏ nhỏ. Ở đầu ngòai này có ông Năm Ngọ, trên này có Ông Chủ Chẹt, còn lại là điền manh, một người dôi ba trăm công.

There was a rich landlord. The others were not as rich. Here there was Mr. Nam Ngo, up there was Landlord Chet, the others were smaller landlords, each had about two or three hundred cong.

[134]

Int: Họ làm lúả
Did they grow rice?

Người ta hoá dất, rồi người ta cho nông dân mướn nên thời đó địa chủ bóc lột nông dân.
People reclaimed the land, then they had farmers rent that land, so people said that landlords were cruel to the farmers.

[137]

Hiếu Int: Giống như Ông Cả Lợi
Like Mr. Ca Loi?

Cả Lợi có 1800 công = 180 héctạ Cả Lợi là địa chủ lớn ở phía bên sông Nước Dục, phía bên đây có Ông Năm Ngọ (Cái Tư), Chủ Chẹt (Vị Thanh) (Ông người Miên lai Tàu). ... Ông chỉ có đất chứ không có nhà cửa, đi tới đâu thì chỉ ở trong lẫm lúa thôị Ông còn một miếng đất nằm ở Xã Vị Đông ở ngòai nữa, và ở đây cất một lẫm lúa làm một nhà máy, kêu ở đây còn Cầu Lẫm Chủ Chẹt (chỗ nhà máy Dan Mạch bây giờ). Chỗ đó có lẫm lúa của ổng ở đó, làm thêm cái nhà máy ở đây.

Ca Loi had 1800 công = 180 hạ Ca loi was a rich landlord at the Nuoc Duc river, here there were Mr. Nam Ngo in Cai Tu; Landlord Chet in Vi Thanh who was a Chinese Cambodian. He just had land, he didn't have any house, he just stayed in the barns. He also had another piece of land in Vi Đong village,

and he built a barn for his rice factory here, which was called Landlord Chet's barn (which is at the Danish factory now). He had a barn there,and had a factory here.

Lúa thu vô đây xay ra, xuống chà và chở đi thành phố chứ không phải bán lúa ở dây. Hồi đó có một nhà máy ở đó. Nhưng ổng không có nhà lớn để ở. Nhà lớn ổng ở Sóc Ven, sau đó mới mua đất dài vô dây Đất này là của ông Dỗ Hữu Trí, ông tòa áo đỏ của [judge with red robes] Tỉnh Rạch Giá. Hồi trước kia là ổng hóa đất này, mới bán lại cho ông Chủ Chẹt. Ông Chủ Chẹt là người ở Sóc Ven này, thuộc Tỉnh Rạch Giá. Theo tui biết là ổng làm địa chủ ba chỗ : Sóc Ven, đây, trên có xã Vị Đông (bây giờ chia xã rồi tui không rành vị Đông thuộc dịa giới nào).
Rice was bought here, then crushed and brought to cities, but not sold here.There was a factory at that time. However, he didn't have big house to live in. His big house had been in Soc Ven, then he gradually bought more land here.This land had belonged to Mr. Do Huu Tri who was a red robe judge in Rach Gia He had reclaimed this land then sold to Landlord Chet. Landlord Chet was from Soc Ven, Rach Gia. As I knew, he owned land in three places: Soc Ven, here, and Vi Đong (I'm not sure Vi Đong belongs to which province nowadays).

[168]

Int: Người dân ở đây có kể chuyện về những điền chủ không? ...
Do the inhabitants here tell about the landlords?

Họ bóc lột nặng, vì đất được tính 60 công, tầm ba thước, tính ra 100 công, mỗi công là 3 gia lúa ruộng. Và lúa cho vay 20%, trâu bò cho mướn. Nhưng cuối mùa vừa trả thuế vừa trả lúa vay, trả mướn trâu bò, nông dân không còn gì hết, có nông dân làm cả trăm công đất nhưng tới mùa có ông không còn lúa để ăn Tết. Nhưng nói thẳng là hồi xưa mấy ổng cũng hay có những vụ chơi bời, bài bạc một phần chứ không phải một mình địa chủ bóc lột dân tàn tệ như vậy! Bóc lột là một mức độ, còn một mặt là lúc đó dân mình cũng thiếu hiểu biết, ky cỏm (cái để tích lũy).

They treated us cruely, every 60 cong would be counted 100 cong, we had to pay sort of tax every 3 gia of rice for every cong of land. And we borrowed their rice with 20% interest, we also rented their buffaloes. However at the end of the harvest, after we paid the tax, paid the rice we borrowed, paid the rent of the buffaloes, we the farmers didn't have anything left. Some people did hundred congs of land but had nothing left for Tet at the end of the harvest. But, objectively speaking, the farmers at that time also gambled, so their poverty was not only because of being stingily treated by the landlords! Being cruely treated was one reason, and another reason was that the people at that time didn't know how to save up.

Dịa bàn này không có mấy cái nhà bằng cây nữa (không có nhà dúc) chỉ là nhà chôn chân thôị Tới mùa nó tập trung ghe vô, những người đóng dồ xuống ghe, dem ra sân ngòai này phơi, có ông Cọp Rằn ở đây coị Chừng nào lúa này đong được thì đong vác vô bồ dồ. Dồ thì từ dưới nền lẫm dồ lên 5 tấc trấu! Rồi mới dồ lúa lên, dồ ngập tới trên, tới hồi cho mình vay thì cứ ngòai xúc vô hết tới nền luôn, trấu cũng đong cho mình luôn, vì cứ hốt hòai trên nó chạy xuống thì cứ hốt hòai, hốt tới nền luôn. Nên cái đó là cái bóc lột mình rõ ràng. 5 tấc trấu đó nói là dồ để cho nó dừng có ẩm, nhưng thực tế khi xúc thì không bỏ cái này lại, họ xúc hết à.

In this region, there were not wooden and cement houses, there were just contemporary houses. When the harvest came, the boats gathered here and brought the rice to dry on the yards out there.There was a man named "Striped Tiger" staying here to protect the rice. Then the rice was brought to the barns. Half a meter high of rice husk was laid on the barn floor before the rice was poured on it! Then when we borrowed their rice, they took both rice and rice husk together and counted the rice husk as rice.That was an example of their cruel treat to us. They

explained that half a metter high of the rice husk on the barn floor was for preventing humudity, but they even scooped this layer together with rice when we borrowed their rice, and it was also counted as we borrowed rice.

[201]

Int: Người dân có được quyền dốn rừng tự do không?...
Did the inhabitants have freedom to cut down the forests?

[208]

Nó cho mình khai phá. Nhưng riêng điền Năm Ngọ khác điền của Chủ Chẹt. Điền Năm Ngọ là điền Tây, vì y là người Việt nhưng y vô dân Tây (quốc tịch Pháp) nên cái của y khác hơn cái này (chủ Chẹt) Ví dụ nhà mình lại mướn đất ở đây, nó cho mình ưu dãi mỗi người một bộ dồ vào dịp Tết cho mỗi người trong nhà, vợ con dau ốm gì lại nó cho thuốc. Nó lợi dụng mình phá rừng. Nếu làm xong mà thất không thu được hột nào thì nó bỏ chớ không chồng thuế lên, nếu giấu mà nó bắt được là chết. Phải thật thà, nếu nó vô coi mà thiệt là thất thu thì nợ nần nó bỏ hết! Làm năm mới chứ không phải nó lấy cái năm này mà chồng năm mới Còn điền Việt mình thì không có vậy, nó cứ dếm tới Thiếu không được.

The guys (the landlords) had us clear the land. But Landlord Nam Ngo was different from Landlord Chet. Nam Ngo was a French landlord, he actually was VietNamese, but he registerd French nationality, so he ran his bussiness differently from Landlord Chet. For example, when we rent his land, he gave every member in our family an outfit when Tet came, and if someone in our family was sick, he gave medicine He "used" us to clear the forests for him. After that if the harvest was not good, he would forgave the debt, he didn't duplicate the tax, but if we told a lie, he would kill us. We must be honest with him, then he would forgave all the debt if the harvest was not good. Then we could start a new year, he didn't count the debt from last year. But, Vietnamese landlords didn't do like that, they dupplicated the tax and the debt, we were not forgiven.

[232]

Nhưng đất vùng này hồi đó thất dữ lắm. Không có khai kinh gì hết. Từ Cái Su xuống tới Hóc Hỏa chỉ có hai dường kinh ngang thôi Nhưng kinh nó không thông thóang mà cong quẹo tùm lum hết.

However this land didn't give good harvest at that time. There were no canals except two crossing canals from Cai Su to Hoc Hoạ The canals were not straight and wide but curved.

Đất phèn không hà.
And there was lots of alum in the land.

[238]

Từ năm Việt nam có chủ quyền, bắt đầu dân được đào kinh xổ phèn. Lúc đầu đào nhỏ, sau này nhà nước làm kinh thủy lợi Đất này hồi đó làm 1 chục công, giờ làm chừng 3 công thôi Nên người nông dân thắc mắc là làm mất đất tui, nhưng hồi đó ông có 10 chục công làm 100 giạ, bây giờ 3 công hơn 100 giạ, thay vì làm 3 công nhẹ hơn, hồi đó phải canh tác 1 chục công mới được 100 giạ lúa, thấy mất đất nhưng không nghĩ cái lợi nhiều hơn!

Since the year Viet nam had the right of independence, the citizens could did more canals to help flow out the alums. First they just did some simple work, after that the government helped make canals.

Then we just needed to do with ten cong instead of thirty cong before.Some people questioned about their losing land because of digging cannals, but they didn't see that they had worked very hard on ten cong to get a hundred gia, now three cong gave more than a hundred gia, why not work on three cong in stead, they didn't see the benefits !

[248]

Int : Nghĩa là trong thời Pháp một người được 10 công, hiện nay 3 công? [Hiểu lầm...]
(The interviewer misunderstood:) That means in the French time a person had 1o cong, now they had only 3 cong?

[251]

Int: Trong thời Việt Minh, đây là vùng giải phóng phải không?
In Viet Minh time, was this region the liberal area?

Hồi 9 năm, giải phóng được 4 năm. Còn trước kia dồn Cầu Dúc nè, dồn Vị Thanh, nó quản lý hết vùng này, mình chỉ còn vùng bên đây, vùng Sông Cái Lớn bển. Tới thời chống Mỹ vẫn còn là vùng căn cứ. Vùng này là vùng rừng rú, lá lú, hoang vu lắm!

In the nine- year time, this region had 4 year of liberation. Before that, Cau Duc station, Vi Thanh station were controled by the guys (the French government), we (The Viet Minh) just had this side and Cai Lon river sidẹ Untill the American time, they were still the base areas. This region was jungles and barren land.

[259]

Int: Vùng căn cứ ở Long Bình hay là có căn cứ...?
Was the base area in Long Binh?

Vùng Long Bình liền tới đây luôn.
From Long Binh to here.

Int: Nghĩa là tất cả các vùng gần Cái Lớn là vùng căn cứ ?
That means all areas near cai Lon were base areas?

Dúng.
Correct.

Int: Người Việt Minh cấp đất vùng này nhưng không cấp đất gần Xà Nỏ
Did Viet Minh grant land in this region but not the land near Xa Nỏ

Vùng Xà No thuộc về vùng bị chiếm bên đây rồi nhưng mà về bên nông dân thì người ta vẫn ủng hộ bên này
Xa No belonged to the French-controled area, but the farmers still supported the Viet Minh.

[265]

Int: Lúc đó ông có ở vùng này không? Người làm nông nghiệp sao
Were you living here at that time? How did people work in agriculture?

Bên này cũng làm ruộng bình thường. Mặc dù bên nây là vùng bị chiếm nhưng nông dân vẫn đóng góp cho cách mạng.
We were still farming as usual. Though this was the French-controlled, the farmers still contributed to the Revolution.

[270]

Int: Trong thời chống Pháp, chông Mỹ, thay đối môi trường, thay đối nông nghiệp làm saỏ
How did the environment, the agriculture change during the French resistance, the American resistance periods?

Không thể tưởng tượng được, thay đối qúa cao! Cụ thể là hồi trước đất của tui là vùng căn cứ, nó ở dưới cái doi [dos d'âne], dưới này là rừng rú không hà. Đất này hồi đó một năm chỉ làm được một vụ, một vụ thì một công tầm ba thước tối da 5 giạ lúa/1công. Từ lúc cách mạng thành công đắp dường ... nhỏ ở dưới không cho nước mặn lên. ở đây năm nào thủy triều mạnh quá mới dồ vô tới đây chứ không là bắt đầu ngọt luôn rồị Từ đó tới giờ cái vùng bên đây tui có muón Xáng thổi lên, làm bây giờ 1 công thu 100..200 giạ lúa một năm. Hồi đó 1 công 1 vụ 5..7 giạ là cùng. Bây giờ 1 công đất có thể làm một năm 3 vụ, mỗi vụ 30...40...50 giạ.

Unimaginable ! They changed so much! Like my land was the base region, it was in the promontory, this part was jungles. One crop per year, one cong gave five gia of rice. Since the Revolution was successful, people started to build the roads. To prevent salty water. The water started to be fresh unless when the tides were so strong that they could flow the salty water in. Here I have also rent dredgers to scoop it up, so that I could harvest a hundred or two hundred gia of rice per cong every year. I the past, one cong of land just gave five or seven gia per crop. Now we can have three crops a year, and every crop we can harvest thirty or fourty or fifty gia of rice per cong.

[291]

Int: Từ năm 45..75, kinh rạch cho thủy nông không thay đối nhiều, có chiến tranh làm dở hơn không tiến bộ được? Hệ thống thủy lợi ra saỏ

From 1945 to 1975, the canals didn't change so much. Did the war make the canals not be able to improvẻ How was the hydraulics system?

Cái này phải chia hai giai dọan : Từ năm 45...năm 60 : chưa khai thông được, vẫn giữ y vì chiến tranh. Chỉ một , hai con kinh mà cách mạng cần thì tập trung dân đào để vận chuyển. Ví dụ con kinh mới là dường ra chỗ xí nghiệp đường, dân đào để chuyển thương, chuyển đạn chứ không thể mở rộng cho giao thông thủy lợị

This should be divided into two periods: from 45 to 60: not being developed yet because of the war. Only one or two canals which the Revolution needed were dug. For example the new canal (that leads to the sugar factory) was dug to help carry wounded soldiers, and cartridge , but not for hydraulic transportation.

[316]

Int : Nghĩa là trước 60, Việt Minh đào kinh làm giao thông cho cách mạng, không phải cho chế độ? Trong một vùng chế độ đào cho chế độ, Việt Minh đào cho Việt Minh?

That means before 1960, Viet Minh dug canals for the Revolution, not for the regime? In a region, the regime dug canals for themselves, and Viet Minh dug canals for Viet Minh?

[322]

Còn vùng này là do Ngô Dình Diệm hồi thời Mỹ lập khu trù mật, nên nó cắt đứt con kinh Xáng Hậu dồn dân vô đây, nó lập "vùng dai trắng" không còn dân ở nên ở đây mới có xẻ lô, thằng Diệm muốn tập trung dân về đây. Còn cái thay đổi nhất là từ năm 75, khi đất nước độc lập rồi, nhưng mình không kể hết sức tiến bộ.

This region was founded as an agroville by Ngo Dinh Diem in the American time, the guy cut Xang Hau canal to drive the people in here, the guy founded " white belt area" without people in there, that is why Diem wanted to gather the inhabitants in here. And the biggest change was from 75, when the country became independent, the development has been uncountable.

Int: Từ 60..75 Vùng này thay đổi sao?
From 60 to 75, how did this region change?

Không thay đổi bao nhiêu, dân bị nó duổi đi không cho ở. Có một số nhiệt tình với cách mạng còn ở lại chút đỉnh. Một ấp ở dôi ba căn nhà, lính vô thì chạy trốn chớ không dám ở. Nên tập trung về đây hết, cả ở xã Vĩnh Viễn cũng chạy dồn qua đây vì vùng trong này là vùng trắng, nếu muốn cải tạo thì cũng không cải tạo được gì hết. Dân ở đây, sáng về bển mần, mần ở đâu cặm cờ 3 que [Saigon flag] tới đó.

Not so much, the guys kicked the inhabitants out of this place. Some people who were supporting the Revolution tried to cling to the village. There were only some houses left in the village, and whenever the (American) soldiers came, the people hid away. People gathered here, even the people in Vinh Vien village, they also gathered here, because this was the "white area", it could not be improved at all. People stayed here, and in the morning, they went back to there to work, and they had to hang the three-striped flag everywhere they worked.

[333]

Int: Làm ăn được hả?
Was their work productive?

Ở ngòai đây, vô làm ăn trong này, nhưng mần chiều phải về ngòai này
We lived out here, and went to work in there, but we had to go back here in late afternoon.

[337]

Int: Sau năm 75 giải phóng vùng này làm saỏ
After 75, how was this place?

Giải phóng rồi dân bắt đầu trở về. Có một số đất hoang đất phèn dã bỏ mười mấy năm, làm lại bờ thửa bằng tay, đào lên trồng khóm. Lúc đó khóm có kinh tế cao Tòan bộ vùng đất bỏ gì cùng làm hết.
After the liberation, people started to come back. People began to improve some barren land and alum land that had been abandoned for more than ten years. They made raised beds by hands, and grew pineapples. Pineapples could sold with high price at that time, so all the abandoned land was used up.

[345]

Làm khóm giống mía, làm liếp?
Did you grow pinapples in the same way as you grew suggarcane on the raised beds?

Liếp, trồng khoảng 5 năm, khóm xuống cấp vì ăn hết chất hạp với nó rồi Cây khóm ngược lại chịu đất phèn, hết phèn rồi nó không còn tốt nữa nên mới quay qua trồng mía cho tới giờ. Vùng đó mía năm nay có thể lên 80.. 90%, chỉ còn ruộng một ít thôi.

Raised beds could be used in about five years till the pineapples took all the suitable nutritions from the land. Pinaapples liked alum land, when the land ran out of alum, pineapples didn't grow well any more, so we changed to grow sugarcane, and we have been growing sugarcane till now. In the region, 80% or 90% has been used for planting sugarcane, only a little land has been used for growing rice.

[352]

Int: Mía có ảnh hưởng như thế nào về dất? Đất ngọt hơn không? đỡ phèn phải không?
How did sugarcane influence on land? Did it make the land sweeter? And did it lessen the alum in the land?

Đất hết phèn mới trồng mía được. Trước kia có người không trồng khóm mà trông mía thì một công cũng 2..3 tấn mía, không đủ tiền nhân công gì hết.
We couldn't plant sugarcane if there was alum in the land. Some people didn't grow pinaapples but sugarcanes, they got two or three tons of sugarcanes per cong, which couldn't give enough money to hire people.

[358]

Int: Trong thời trước giải phóng, không trồng khóm hả?
Before the Liberation, didn't people grow pineapples?

Hồi đó khoét được chỗ nào trồng được giạ lúa nào ăn giạ lúa nấy, vừa làm vừa chạy không ai cải tạo, làm bờ vùng bờ thửa gì, tự do, muốn làm gì thì làm. .. Nhưng thời trước nước không nhiều bằng bây giờ, bỏ Đại đó nước cũng không ngập lúa nữa, còn như bây giờ nếu bỏ Đại vậy nước ngập chết hết. Nước bây giờ cao
At that time, we had to do farming and escaping at the same time, the rice was barely enough for eating; the land was not improved at all, the people plant whatever they could. .. However at that time, water was not as much as water nowadays, the rice couldn't be flooded. Now if you left the field without taking care of it, it would be flooded and the rice would die. The water nowadays is high.

[366]

Int: Tại sao nước bây giờ cao
Why is the water now high?
Khoa học giải thích chớ không biết.
I don't know, just the science could explain.

[375]

Int : Dân số thay đổi như thế nào từ hồi ông còn nhỏ tới nay
How has the population changed since you were young?

Thay đổi dữ lắm, biết kể làm sao bây giờ.

A lot, I don't know how to tell.

[377]

Int: Xưa có nhiều người Khơ me ở vùng này không?
Were there many Khmer people living here?

Họ hổng ở trên này đâu, chỉ ở trong đó không hà. Ở vùng sâu Bây giờ tiến bộ ... thời đó 1 sóc có 1.. 2 nhà kê bằng cây. Nhưng ngày nay từ khi dộc lập tới giờ nhà kiên cố, bán kiên cố, lợp ngói, lợp tol chiếm 50% sắp lên.
They didn't live up here. They lived mostly in there. In the rural areas. Now it's different. At that time, there was only one or two wooden houses in a Khmer village Since the country became independent, 50% of the houses in the village have been solid and semi- solid houses with tile roofs, sheet iron roofs.

[394]

Đất dai hồi xưa một công trúng lắm là 15 giạ, bây giờ 1 công trúng mùa là từ 120.. 150 giạ. Một công tầm lớn là từ 40..50 giạ. Chứng tỏ sự tiến bộ vượt bậc, kinh tế từ một công thu mười mấy giạ, bây giờ thu 100 mấy giạ thì vượt quá cao
In the past, the most successful harvest just gave about 15 gia of rice per cong of land, now the most successful harvest may give from 120 to 150 gia per cong. One cong gives everage 40 or 50 gia of rice. It proves the unimaginable development, from ten gia per cong to a hundred gia per cong. So high...

[408]

Int: Về Vườn Cò [Ông đã nói trước]?
How about Stork garden?

Vườn Cò mới tiêu trong những năm bình dịnh 68..69. Từ đó tới giờ vườn Cò mới tiêu.
Stork garden disappeared during the pacification years in 1968, 1969.

Int : Trước năm 69 Cò nhiều
Before 1969, were there lots of storks?

Cò, Diệc , Còng Cọc..... Còng Cọc nhiều Mình đi ở trên là thấy nó lót ổ, con nó lú đầu lền hết trơn ... Lúc có quốc gia lại nó cũng ngang nhiên đi bắn, bắt, mình đâu dám cản. Bắt đầu đi từ từ, thưa, lúc Mậu Thân ác liệt, dân đi rồi, mạnh ai nấy làm nên nó mới bị tiêu diệt luôn.

Storks, herons, and cormorants. Lots of cormorants. When you walked up here, you could see them making nests, and their offspring ... Sometimes the American soldiers went by, they shot and caught the storks, we couldn't prevent them. Then the storks started to go away, until the violent Mau Than time (1968), people also moved away, and the Stork garden disappeared.

[432]

Int : Dáng lẽ dân đi thì chim cò có thể sống được, tại sao lại mất?
The birds should have been living safely when the people went away, why did they disappear?

(Cô Hạnh của Phòng Môi Trường, UBND Vị Thanh) Vì chiến tranh ác liệt và Mỹ rải chất độc mầu da cam...
(Ms. Hanh, Environment office, People's Committee of Vi Thanh) Because the war was so violent and the Americans scattered the "orange poisons".

Mỹ rải chất độc hóa học cây cối chết, chỉ còn chút ít đâu đủ cho nó tập trung.
The Americans scattered agent orange which killed the trees, so there was no place for the birds lived.

Int : Vùng này bị rải chất độc màu da cam?
Was this region scattered the orange poisons?

[435]

Ừ rải dữ lắm. Chỗ tui ở hồi đó nó bắn rớt 1 chiếc phản lực ở Vị Thanh, một ngày nó bỏ chín lần bom. Rồi nó dem máy bay rải chất độc hóa học, vì nó phát hiện ra chỗ đó bắn nó. Bởi vậy chỗ tui ở giờ lỗ bom, lỗ như khuôn bánh khọt. [clay pan with holes in it for making a kind of cake - compares with the bomb holes on the landscape]

Yeah, a lot. At the place where I was living at that time, they shot down a jet from Vị Thanh, and in one day they dropped bombs nine times. Then they sent airplanes to scatter the chemical agents where their plane was shot. So my place had a lot of bomb holes, like a *khọt* pan.

[443]

Lổ tu húyt bây giờ mất rồi, nhưng lổ bom vẫn còn tang chứng rành rành. Lọai M105 nó bỏ trái nào trái nấy xứng dáng luôn.Ban đêm thì B57 nó bỏ mà có trúng nhà thì khỏi còn người nào luôn, mất xác luôn.

Other holes have disappeared now, but the bomb holes are still there as evidence. They drooped M105's violently here. At night, wherever the B57 dropped its bombs, there was no one alive.

Int : B57 đi từ Vị Thanh?
Did B57 go from Vi Thanh?

Không, từ Trà Nóc hay ở đâu đó, không phải từ dây Nó gọi là bỏ bom trộm. Ban đêm nó bay muốn bỏ đâu thì bỏ à. Ban ngày nó có chiếc trinh sát, muốn bỏ ở đâu thì phóng pháo xuống, khói lên thì nó ghim nó bỏ, ban đêm thì nó bỏ đâu nó bỏ, nên người ta gọi là bỏ bom trộm

No, may be somewhere from Tra Noc, not from here. People called that furtive bombing. They flew around at night, and dropped bombs anywhere they wanted to. During the days, they had spy airplanes that dropped artillery at the place they wanted to drop the bombs; at night they dropped bombs anywhere they liked, so people called that furtive bombing.

[457]

Int: Họ bỏ bom và chất độc màu da cam, ban ngày hay ban đêm?
Did they drop bombs and orange poisons day time or night time?

Ban ngày, hồi đó nó rải ở xã này lần đầu tiên là lọai cánh xéo, là C-130. Nó ở trên cao phun xuống thấy như mù sương bay ra, sau này nó để trên trực thăng đi sát mình. Chổ tui là bị trực thăng phun. Nó phun nếu mình ở trong đó là ướt mình luôn. Hồi nó phun ra nó ướt vậy thôi, chứ sau khô rồi trắng như vôi bột, 3 ngày sau cây cối rũ lá.

During the day, in this village for the first time they sent the wing sprayers, the C-130's. They went up high, spraying down like fog, after that they carried it on planes and flew closer to us. My place was soaked by the airplane. If I'd been inside it I would have been soaked, too. After that when the poison dried, it looked like lime, just 3 days later, the trees dropped their leaves.

Int : Tức là trước Mậu Thân có rừng nhưng sau đó do chất độc màu da cam hết rừng hết chim?

That means before Mau Than, there were jungles, but then the jungles and the birds went away because of orange poisons?

Hết chim, hết cò, từ đó nó chỉ còn tiếng thôi chứ không còn cò chim gì nữa hết...
No more birds, no more storks, since then just words, no more birds...

[479]

Int : Năm 69 vùng này trồng lúa được không?
In 69, could you grow rice here?

Trồng hết trơn hà. Trồng lúa được vì nó rải theo trong vườn này không hà. Còn ở ngòai này thì lúa chưa thấy ảnh hưởng gì. Nhưng các loại hoa màu thì có lọai bị ảnh hưởng. Ví dụ như cây mì, mặc dù nó rải ở Kinh Đông thiệt là xa nhưng hơi bay lên đây héo lá luôn. Còn hàng Bông thì bị rải gần, coi như bị tiêu diệt luôn. Tuy không trúng ngay cái điểm, nhưng hơi bay cũng bị tiêu diệt luôn. Chỉ có cây bình bát là chịu dựng được, nó rụi lá rồi mọc ra lại Ngòai ra những cây khác chết hết.

Sure. We could grow rice because it just scattered in the garden, I didn't see any effect out there in the field. However, the flowering plants were affected. For example, the cassava could be dropped by the poisonous air from the East. And cotton could die when the poisons were scattered near it, even the poisonous air could kill it. Only *bình bát* trees [Annona glabra] could endure the poisons, they withered and then grew up again. All other kinds of tree died.

[497]

Int : Cháu nghe nói có một lọai hóa chất làm cho lúa mọc lên nhưng không có hạt?
I heard there was a kind of chemical substances that made the paddy grow without grains?

[501]

Ở đây thì không có cái đó, nhưng thất thì có, không biết có phải ảnh hưởng cái đó không. Còn cái vùng ven bị nó rải thì thất nhiều, một bụi 10 bông thì bị khô khỏang 2..3..4..5 bông. Cái đó không hiểu được là do chất độc nó rải hay là do đất dai của mình.

We didn't experience that kind, but the harvests were very bad, I'm not sure if that was because of chemical substances. In the edge areas, which was terribly scattered, the harvests failed all the time: 2 or 5 branches out of 10 branches of pady could be dried. I don't know if it was because of the poisons the guys scattered or because of our land.

[510]

Int : Sau thời đó cây cỏ đất dai trở lại như cũ ra saỏ Mấy năm saủ
After that how did the land and the trees recover? How many years later?

Cở khoảng 3 năm trở lại là cây có nó mọc trở lại, mà còn tốt hơn trước nữa.
About three years later, the trees grew up again, and they grew better.

[Interviewer misunderstands]

[520]

...

[527]

Int : Hiện nay như ở Tràm Chim, Hà Tiên, có Sếu đầu đỏ trở lại Ở đây có không?
Like now in Tram Chim in HaTien, Red head cranes have come back. Does it happen here?

Không, nhưng hồi xưa có. Bây giờ ở đây những tràm chim lớn có cò. Mấy năm trước tôi có một miếng trúc cò về hơi đông. Rồi Trúc có giá trị kinh tế thấp quá, tui phá trồng mía nên nó đi hết rồi
No, they just lived here in the past. Now there were storks in big bird gardens. Several years ago, I had a bamboo garden which attracted lots of storks. Then because bamboo couldn't be sold with high price, I changed to plant sugarcanes, so the storks went away

[540]

Int : Nghĩa là trước bị chiến tranh ... sau năm 1969 là ít cò và hiện nay cò không có chỗ ở?
That means before, there was war, then after 1969, there were fewer storks, and now the storks don't have place to livẻ

Ở đây nhiều vườn lớn còn cò. Ở đây không biết cò ở đâu nhưng sáng cũng thấy bầy cỡ trăm con. Ở ruộng tui hổm nó ở cả một bầy ngòai đồng thấy trắng hết luôn, không biết ở đâu nó lại Ở đây nó ở lẻ tẻ không co nhiều, ở đây nếu có vườn lớn thì nó sẽ trở về.
There are storks in some big gardens here.In the morning we can see a herd of about a hundred storks, I don't know where they come from. Once in my field there was a herd coming, I didn't know where they were from. There are not many living here, if there were big gardens, they would come back.

[557]

Int: Ở đây có vườn cò không?
Was there any stork garden here?

(Hạnh) Ở đây không có...có khỏi một chút về phía Ô Môn có vườn cò Bằng Lăng. Cò đi ăn về dậu ở dó, có cây không thấy cây nữa chỉ thấy cò dậu Đi vô đó phải đi ghe và đội nón.
(Hanh) No, but in Omon there is one called Bang Lang garden. Lots of storks ther, sometimes you can't see the tree, you just can see storks hanging on that treẹ If you come visit, you should wear your hat. (Or the storks would poop on your head Translator)

[570]

Int: Cá ở đây thế nào?
How about the fish here?
Hồi đó cá dữ lắm, bây giờ không có còn gì đâu! Tiếp thu rồi, về, con tôm càng nhiều, tát bắt cả thúng,

lúc đó bắt ăn chớ bán đâu có giá trị gì dậu Hồi thời nước mặn vô, đủ lọai cá hết. Giờ sông cái bển chỉ còn nhiều nhất là cá Dồ (cá tra).
There were lots in the past, but now, nothing at all. After 1975, there were lots of prawns. At that time, we couldn't sell them, nobody bought them. When slat water came in, there were a lots of fish. Now in the big river over there, you just can find only cat fish.

[590]

Int : Thời địa chủ và thuê dất, có thể câu cá và tôm càng có thể bắt miễn phí phải không?
In the time of the landlords, we could catch fish and prawns free, couldn't we

Được ở đây vấn đề cá địa chủ không quản lý.
The landlords here didn't control that.

[595]

Int : Cháu nghĩ giá của cá hơn giá lúả Theo suy nghĩ của cháụ
To my opinion, fish was more expensive than rice.

Hồi xưa thì bắt ăn thôi, chứ bán có tiền có bạc gì dậu
In the past we just fished for food, not for money

[603]

...

Int : Không buôn bán?
No business? No tradẻ

Có nhưng bán không được tiền bạc gì nên không ai bắt.
Yes, we tried to sell them, but no one wanted to buy, so we couldn't get any money from selling the fish.

[606]

Int : Khi nào ... cá ruộng, cá sông năm nào xuống?
When did the field fish and the river fish become rare?

[607]

Bây giờ cá đồng cá sông xuống muốn diệt chủng luôn, bị vì trên đồng cứ dùng thuốc bảo vệ thực vật hòaị Ba bốn tháng là thu họach một vụ. Thứ nhất là mình xịt thuốc nó chết, thứ hai là lúc lúa mình gần mần mình xiết nước đi, cho nó cạn dất. Con cá ở vùng này khó sinh sản lắm, bị vì mình tăng vụ lên là không có chỗ cho con cá sinh sản nữa. Hồi xưa tháng 4 sắp lên, mưa, mấy dường nước cá giống nó lên, cá mẹ lên dẻ tới tháng 10, 11; Khô thành ra nó lớn lên ở trên đồng, nó sống, sanh dẻ được. Bây giờ ba bốn tháng thu hoạch một lần. Cá đồng bây giờ dân mình chỉ nuôi ăn, chứ cá thiên nhiên không còn đủ ăn.

Now river fish and field fish are on the way of extinction because of the pesticides used in the fileds. Crops were harvested every 3 or 4 months. First, they die by pesticides; second, when we are going to harvest, we flow the water in the filed out, so the fish don't have water to live in. It is terribly difficult

for the fish in this region to beget, because we keep increasing the crops, they don't have place to live and to generate In the past since the fourth month of the year, there was lots of rain, the breed fish followed the water way up here, they stayed here to lay eggs till the tenth or the eleventh month. It was dry at that time, so they stayed in the field and generated. Now people harvest every three or four months. Filed fish now are all cultured by people for food, we can't find natural fish any more.
...

[SIDE B]

[001]

Đất này tốt, phân hữu cơ không lại nó. Bây giờ khoa học nên nghiên cứu làm thế nào lấy phần đất này để cải tạo mặt đất ở trên. Chính tui làm rồi, thấy một năm một vụ chỉ có 5..7 giạ lúa thôị Tui mới mướn xáng thổi cái này lên. Bây giờ trung bình một năm ba vụ, một trăm, trăm ngòai giạ lúa, còn trồng mía ba tấn, năm tấn, giờ có thể lên 15..17 tấn là nhờ phù sa này Nếu nền kinh tế muốn lên nữa (như hôm đó tui có viết một đề án trình thủ tướng chánh phủ). ..

This soil is good, fertilizer can't compare.Now I think scientists should study how to take this soil to improve the land surface.I myself tried that: before I did one crop per year, every cong gave 5 or 7 gia of rice, then I rent dredgers to scoop this up. Now on the average I can do 3 crops per year, and get more than a hundred gia of rice, and also get 15 or 17 tons of sugarcane compared to 3 or 5 tons in the past. That is thanks to this alluvium. If we want to help the economics grow faster (like what I have written in the project sent to the Prime Minister).

Bây giờ con sông cái bển, tất cả các đất doi còn hoang hóa, sản xuất bấp bênh, không bờ bạo.... rồi mình không có điều kiện dem đất phù sa lên, nên bây giờ khoang đó còn mấy ngàn ha đất (giờ đề nghị chánh phủ) . Tui làm cái đề án gởi, nhưng chỉ dán tem gởi đi, không thấy trả lời Nên giờ tui nói, từ một công đất năm bảy giạ tiến lên một công cả trăm gia; mía từ 3..5 tấn, giờ tiến lên 15..17 tấn. Như vậy khoang mấy ngàn ha đất như vầy, nếu đưa được cái này lên thì kinh tế mình lên tới cỡ nào? Yêu cầu thủ tướng chánh phủ cho khảo sát xem xét lại, có kế hoạch làm vùng này Hôm rồi tui có xin ở Tỉnh, mấy ổng có đầu tư cho một trăm mấy hai trăm triệu, bây giờ Xáng dang cạp. (Bửa nay gặp khó mới đi ra gặp mấy ông ủy ban). Cạp để làm bờ bạo

Now on that big river side, all the promontories are still barren, no banks, no shores. We don't have enough conditions to bring the alluvium up, so we just leave these thousand hectas of land there (now we should suggest to the government). I have written a project and sent to the governenmt, but I haven't received any respond yet. Let's see, from 5 to 7 gia of rice per cong, we can have hundreds of gia per cong; from 3 or 5 tons of sugarcanne per cong, we can have 15 or 17 tons per cong. So if we helped improve these thousand congs, how much can we get? I think the Prime Miinister should have this region examined and put in project. I have once asked money from the Provincial People Committee, they gave about two hundred million Vndongs, now I'm having the dredgers work there.(Today I have some difficulties so I have to go see the People Committtee for help). We dredge to make protective banks.

[020]

Còn một cái thứ hai, bây giờ lòng sông này cong sẵn, tui coi trên sơ đồ tui biết, như vậy mình cần khai thông cái này, đó là thứ nhất. Thứ hai là dừng cho người ta nuôi cò với lục bình nữa. Hiện thời nó cản trở giao thông. Người ta cặm chà nuôi, tới mùa này đỡ, lục bình bị xô ra, tất cả sông rạch giờ muốn qua lại các sông rạch này không đi lại được.
And another thing, this river is naturally curved, as I see on the map, so we need to expand this. Then

we prohibit peoplés raising grass and water hyacinth. They impede traffic and transportation. People raise water hyacinth here, this is the season, we can't travel in these rivers during this season.

[026]

Int : Hiện nay có lục bình nhiều lắm?
Are there a lot of water hyacinth?

Nước cháy xuôi thì đỡ, nếu sựng lại thì ghe mấy chục tấn cũng mắc cạn, mắc lục bình luôn. Ngày xưa nước mặn không có lục bình, còn bầy giờ nước ngọt, nuôi kiểu này mà nhà nước không khai thông cái này, cắm lòng sông, không được cất chà thì mới giảm bớt, chứ để vậy vài năm nữa không biết sao bây giờ.
If water goes throughly, it's Ok. If it can't go throughly, the boats are stuck in the water hyacinth . When the water was salty in the past, there were no water hyacinth. Now the water is fresh, water hyacinth is raising this way, it would be a big problem in the next some years if we didn't solve it now.

[036]

Int : Người dịa phương thích lục bình không?
Do the people here like water hyacinth?

Ai mà thích, nhưng vì lợi nhuận riêng của người ta, người ta cắm chất chà, nhưng cái này ngòai qui hoạch nhà nước. Nhà nước luôn khai thông dòng sông, xả lũ, không phải cho cắm mé cất chà dậu Nếu nhà nước không có kế hoạch làm thì sẽ có trở ngại : thứ nhất, nếu họ cất được dống chà đây thì đất trong này họ chiếm luôn. Mà đất chiếm này không nằm trong đạng đóng thuế nghĩa vụ cho nhà nước, mà tòan là gây thêm cản trở giao thông cho dân cho nước.

Nobody likes it, but because of money, they have to raise it. This is not in the scheme of the government. The government always encourage removing obstructions in the rivers, rinsing flood out. If now the government don't act quickly, there will be problems: Not only do people raise water hyacinth and use land naturally without paying tax, but also that will impede transportation.

Interview 7
Mr. Bảy Long
April 19, 2002
Hoá Lựu Commune
Phụng Hiệp District

...

Ông nội, cha mẹ ở đây, khoảng gần 200 năm.
My randparents, my parents had been living here, about 200 years.

[020]

Int: Thiên nhiên ở đây như thế nào?
How was the nature here?
Lúc tui về đây là còn rừng, còn cọp. Rừng có tràm, bần, Dái ngựa, Còng Diệp.
When I came here, there were jungles, and tigers. There were cajeputs, Bần, Dai ngua, Cong Diep.

[030]

Int: Người dịa phương dùng cây còng làm gì?
What did the local people use Cong for?

Người khá giả trồng còng ở trước cửa nhà vì nó có tán lớn mát, cây diệp cũng vậy Khoảng 9-10 thước trồng đất cao ... Ngày tui nhỏ có còng, diệp, nhưng bây giờ nó không có giá trị kinh tế nên người ta dốn bó còng, diệp cũng còn ít.

Rich people planet it in front of their houses because they like its large shadow; Diep was similar. They were 9 or 10 metters high, and could be planed on higher land. In the past there were lots of Cong and Diep, but now they don't have high economic value , so people cut them down.

[046]

Int : Có vết tích cây to gần đây không?
Are there any traces of big trees near here?

Hết.
Nọ

[052]

...

Int: Thời cha mẹ của ông, lúc ông nhỏ, khi nào đất ở đây được canh tác?
In your parents'time, when you were young, when was the land here cultivated?

Hồi xưa khai phá từng lõm. Ví dụ như xóm này ở 4..8 nhà (cụm), khai khẩn vòng vòng dây Cụm khác cách đây 500..700 thước làm một khoảnh vậy, từng cụm chứ không thành liền miếng nhau Còn kinh rạch (như cái kinh trước này) chỉ chống thôi chứ không chèo được, nhỏ, bề ngàng chừng hai, ba thước.

At that time people cultivated part by part. For example, there were 4 to 8 families living as a cluster in this village, they cleared waste land for cultivation around here.They cultivated another cluster 500 or 700 metters away from here, they didn't do the whole big area of land. And the canals (as this one), were only 2 or 3 metters wide, you couldn't row in it.

[061]

Int : Đi bằng ghẻ
Did you travel by boat?

Xuồng nhỏ có cây chống.
By small boats, with the rows or long sticks to push the boats.

Int: Đi nhiều người
Could many people go together?

Có khi 2, 3 người cũng được nhưng chỉ có một người chống à (ghe to hơn xuồng, ván xuồng mỏng hơn)
Soemtimes 2 or 3 people could go at the same time, but only one person pushed the boat, (the boat is bigger than a canoe).

[066]

Int : Đi xuồng câu cá hay làm ruộng?
Did you use the boat for fishing or farming in the field?
Nó là phương tiện đi đứng : đi chợ, cụm nhà này lại cụm nhà kia Không có dường đi bộ, đi bằng rạch.

It was the means of transportation: going to the market, going from this house cluster to that house cluster. There was no road, we just traveled by arroyos.

[069]

Int : Rạch tự nhiên quan trọng nhất của vùng này là?
What was the most important natural arroyo in this region?
[Không trả lời] No answer.

Int : Ở đây xưa có nhà?
Were there houses here at that time?

Có, tính từ thời ông nội tui nay khoảng hơn 100, 100 ngòai năm, gần 200 năm.
Yes, they have been living here since my grandparents' time, nearly 200 years already

[075]

Int : Ông nội ông làm bao nhiêu hecta? Thuê dất?
How many hectas of land did your grandfather cultivate? Did he have to rent land?

Thuê của địa chủ. Địa chủ Trần Ngọ (5 Ngọ) "Propriétaire" ... Hồi trước lúc xuống đây có 4,5 người bà con nữa hùn vốn lại thuê cũng cỡ 20 hoặc 30 hạ Có vốn mới được, còn dùng tay thì 1 hay 2 hạ Chỉ phát bằng tay, cào Hồi trước có trâu cày

He had to rent land from the landlords Tran Ngo (5 Ngo) .. . He came here with 4 or 5 relatives, they pooled money to rent about 20 or 30 hectas. We had to have money, or we just could cultivate 1 or 2 hecta by hand. People used buffaloes, too

Int: Trâu nuôi ở đây hay mua ở chỗ khác?
Did people raise buffaloes here or did they buy them from some where?

Trâu mua chỗ khác lại, không phải nuôi
Buffaloes were bought from other places, not raised here.
Hồi trước ông nội tui quê ở Sài Gòn, rủ 5, 7 người xuống dưới này đỡ hoang khai phá.
My grandfather came from Saigon. He traveled here with 5 or 7 friends to clear waste land.

Int : Họ đi bằng ghe từ Long An tới đây và mang trâu từ Long An tới hay mua ở dây?
Did they traveled by boats from Long An and brought buffaloes from Long An or they bought them here?

[094]

Xuống đây mới mua trâu Đi dọ có đất xong mới mua trâu
They bought the buffaloes here.They went to find land first, then bought buffaloes later.

Int : Thời đó có nhiều Khơ me ở đây không?
Were there many Khmer people living here?

Có nhưng ít.
Not many

Int : Mua trâu của Khơ me?
Did they buy buffaloes from the Khmers?

Không, Khơ me ở Nam Vang mới có Trâu, Bò. Còn Khơ me ở đây chỉ ở lẻ tẻ vài gia đình nghèo, họ ở rạch cùng [not sure if proper name or location] không hà. Phương tiện làm ăn của người Khơ me lúc đó không có, chủ yếu họ bắt rắn rùa và nhậu nhiều lắm.

No, just the Khmers living in NamVang had buffaloes and cows. The Khmers living here were very poor, they used to live in rural arroyos. They didn't have any means of earning a living, they mostly caught snakes and tortoises for food and they also drank a lot.

[108]

Int : Đầu thế kỷ này ở đây có rừng tràm, cắt (dốn) hết cây Còng chưả
Was there cajeput jungles here, and was Cong cut down all at the beginning of this centurỷ

Bây giờ còn ít ít, không còn.
Just some left now, not much.

Int : Lúc ông nhỏ, ích lợi của việc thuê 20 ha trồng rừng tràm như thế nào?
What was the benefits of renting 20 ha to plant cajeputs at the time when you were young?

Tràm có nhưng ở đây cây không tốt. Ở vùng Rạch Gòi, cây lớn phá xài hết rồi, còn cây nhỏ thôi Trước kia rừng hoang thôi, không trồng gì hết.

Cajeputs here were not so good. In Rach Goi, people cut down all the big trees, there were only small trees left. The jungles were wild, we didn't plant anything in them.

Int : Nghĩa là trong thời gian ở đây, gia dình làm lúả Bây giờ cũng trồng lúả
That means when your family was living here, you grew rice, and now, you are also growing rice?

Ở hồi trước đây 20 năm, ở đây lúa không. Sau này đất ở đây phì nhiêu trồng lúa không bằng trồng các loại cây khác, nên chuyển qua trồng mía và các lọai cây ăn trái : cam quýt, giá trị kinh tế cao hơn lúa ... Từ 15 năm trở lại đây da số là mía

20 years ago, all here was rice.Then the land here became better, people changed to plant different kinds of fruits which brought more profits than rice like orange, sugarcane. , ostly sugarcane in the past 15 years.
130

Thời kháng chiến, lúả
In the Resistance time, did people grow rice?

Lúc dánh Mỹ còn lúa.
Rice was still grown during the time of fighting the Americans.

Thời chống Pháp, vùng này là căn cứ Việt Minh?
In the fighting French period, was this the place of Viet Minh?

Căn cứ lớn ở U minh, nhưng từng dịa phương có những rừng nhỏ, ví dụ như ở đây có Kinh 5, giờ là trại giam của Bộ ở đó. Hồi đó là rừng tràm, 40, 50 ha (thời kỳ Pháp)

The biggest base was in U Minh, but every regin had smaller jungles, like there was Kinh 5 here, now used as a prison. In French time, here was cajeput jungles, about 40 or 50 hectas largẹ

[144]

Thời Pháp có sử dụng tràm không?
Were cajeputs used in French time?

Có, có hãng ở dưới, có một tên địa chủ lớn, có hãng Sô phô [SOFEÒ] trồng tràm, sau đó chỗ đó làm căn cứ vùng này Thời kỳ chống Mỹ làm căn cứ Tỉnh Uỵ

Yes, there was a factory there.There was a rich landlord who had had SOFEO cajeput factory which was used as a base area of this region. Then it was used as the Provincial base in American resistance time.
...

[159]

Vùng này nước mặn?
Was ther water salty here?

Hồi trước vùng này nước mặn tới Vị Thanh, vì da số là kinh nhỏ, chỉ có sông Cái Tư là lớn thôị Mùa này bắt đầu cỡ cuối năm dã có nước mặn vộ

The water was salty from here to Vi Thanh, because there were only one big river Cai Tu, the others are small canlas. From this season to the end of the year, salty water often came in.

[166]

Int : So sánh xưa và nay thủy lợi thay đổi như thế nào?
How can we compare hydraulics in the past and that nowadays?

Dữ lắm, hồi trước đâu có kinh lớn, kinh địa chủ đào lấy nước làm ruộng 2, 3 thước 3,4 thước.
Lots of differnces. There were no wide canals in the past. The canals were about 2 or 3 or 4 meters wide , they were dug by the landlords to get water for farming only

Thời chống Mỹ đào một số kinh lớn đi lại cho thuận tiện, chèo xuồng được. Nhưng bắt đầu từ giải phóng tới giờ, kinh cũ làm lớn hết, những nơi có đồng dều xả kinh hết .Nên so lại thủy lợi vùng này chủ động giữ nước được, dem nước lên, hoặc tháo nước ra được. Kinh dữ lắm.

In fighting American time, some big canals were dug to help traveling, the boats could go in them. However, since liberation day, the old canals have been widened, every field has had canals to help rinse the water out. The hydraulic system in this region is very active thanks to lots of canals.

[177]

Int : Ông làm ruộng? Năm nào?
When did you start farming?

Cả trăm năm rồi
About a hundred years.

Int : Lúa thay đổi như thế nào?
How has the rice changed?

Hồi trước làm lúa mùa một năm 1 vụ thôị Nếu đất mới khai khẩn, 1 công 6..8 giạ, sau đó nếu trúng lắm là 15 giạ trở lại (thời Pháp năm 42,43).

In the past we just did one crop per year. Newly cultivated land could give 6 or 8 gia of rice per cong, then the most successful harvest could give about 15 gia per cong 9(in French time in 1942, 1943)

[190]

Int : Hồi đó xài giống gì?
What kind of breeds did people used at that time?

1,2 loại : giống Dốc Phụng, Mỏng Chim (Vàng, Ngon Cơm) (khô, nở) và nếp.
One or two kinds: Doc Phung, Mong Chim, (which gave yellow pady, good dry rice) and Sticky rice.
Int : Kế hoạch trồng lúa như thế nào?
What was the planting plan?

Hồi trước chưa biết xạ, chỉ gieo mạ. Ví dụ muốn có lúa cấy phải gieo mạ, hột lúa ngâm cho nó lên, rồi khoanh một bờ thửa vuông. Nếu gieo mạ thì một công 1000 m2 phải gieo 4 giạ giống, khít khít vầy Hai tháng sau nhổ mạ, bó lại, cấy rạ Trung bình một giạ mạ cấy khoảng 4..5 công

đất cấy ... Tốn giống có khi một mùa trăm ngòai, 70..80 giạ giống.

At that time we didn't know how to fire the fields, we just sowed rice seedlings. Forexample we had to sow rice seedilngs before we transplant them in the filed, we soaked rice beads in water first. We needed 4 gia of rice breeds for a thousand square meters. Two months after sowing the rice seedlings, we pulled the rice seedlings up, then transplant them. As the everage, one gia of rice seedlings could be transplanted on 4 or 5 cong of land. Every crop needed from 70 , 80 to a hundred gia of rice breeds.

[220]

Int: Còn bán lúa saỏ
How about selling rice?

Khi thu hoạch phải đong lúa ruộng cho địa chủ (tô), hoặc lúa vay rồi mới được chở lúa bán.
We had to pay the tax and the debt to the landlords first, then we were allowed to sell the rest.

[222]

Int : Đưa điền chủ %? Bao nhiêu cho ông?
How many pecents did you have to pay the landlords? Hpw much was for yoủ

Không tính %, cứ tính mỗi công là bao nhiêu giạ, một công bao nhiêu kg, hồi trước ruộng thất, một công ăn 2 giạ, sau trúng một công ăn 3 giạ. Cỡ 30%.

We didn't count by percentage, before we paid two gia per cong, after that if the harvest was good we paid 3 gia per cong. About 30%.

Int : 100 gia dình được 4..5 công, một công 11..12 giạ, đưa 3 giạ cho địa chủ, còn 7..8 giạ cho gia dình/công, còn 24 giạ. Nếu không đủ ăn làm gì?
100 families had 4 or 5 cong, one cong gave 11 or 12 gia, 3 gia was paid for the landlord, 7 or 8 gia was for each family, there was 24 gia left . .. What did you do when you didn't enough food to eat?

Làm mướn hoặc vay lúa lại của địa chủ. Nên làm ruộng không dư bao nhiệu Có vốn, trâu bò thì còn dư chút dinh, còn không đủ vốn thì hỏi, rồi làm trả hết, có khi còn nợ lại

We found more job, or we had to borrow rice from the landlord again. We didn't have enough to eat. People who had little money and some buffaloes could liv eOk, otherwise we were always in debt.

[242]

Int : Phần lớn người dịa phương có đủ ăn không?
Did the local people have enough food to eat?

Ăn cháo, cỡ tháng 7..8 đa số hụt ăn phải ăn cháọ
We ate rice gruel, most of us had to eat rice gruel duriong the seventh or the eightth month every year when we ran out of rice.

245

Thời kháng chiến, vùng này trồng lúa ủng hộ Việt Minh?

In the Resistance time, did this region grow rice to support Viet Minh?

Phải Lúc kháng chiến dánh Pháp, địa chủ chạy hết rồi, khỏi đóng tô (địa chủ). Nếu mình trúng mùa thì trích cho kháng chiến khoảng 10%. Biên vậy thôi chớ lúa mình giữ ở nhà. Có nơi làm vựa mướn người giữ, nêu nhà dân rộng thì gởi nhà dân, chừng nào muốn lấy gạo thì có người cho hay, rồi gia dình xay, và người ta lại lấy ... có chỗ thì mượn người giữ, làm vựa Còn không thì gia dình mình giữ.

Yes, in the resistance time of fighting the French, the landlords ran away, we didn't have to pay tax. If we had good harvest, we saved about 10% to support the Resistance.We kept the rice in at home, when they needed, they just had someone come and inform us, we husked the rice and gave them. If they didn't have place to keep rice, we could keep at home for them.

[265]

Int: Môi trường trong thời kỳ chống Mỹ?
How was the environment in the fighting American time?

Thời kỳ chống Mỹ ở đây ác liệt lắm, vùng này là vùng bom đạn. Vì hai bên : bên này là du kích (tụi [bunch] Mỹ gọi là Việt Cộng) hoạt dộng, nên nó sợ nó bắn vô, ở ngòai vẫn đi càn, vùng này hồi trước kêu là vùng "cài răng lược", bên nây chìa vô, bên ngo?ai chĩa rạ

In American time, it was miserable here.This region was the bomb areạ There were two sides: this side was Viet Cong (called by bunch Americans), that side was the Americans, the inside shot out, the outside shot in. People called this region " a comb region"

[277]

Int : Trước thời kỳ chống Mỹ vùng này trồng lúả
Before the American time, did people grow rice here?

Lúa hết.
All rice.

Int : Sau thời Mỹ đất hoang?
After American time, was the land abandoned?
Không, vẫn trồng lúa. ... Sau 75 vẫn trồng lúa không có cây rừng.
No, still growing rice.After 75, still growing rice, no plants.

[284]

Dân ở đây chịu khó ... giặc vô, du kích chống giặc. Dân chạy trốn, giặc về cũng trở lại ruộng vườn cũng làm ăn, còn nhà thì có hầm tránh pháo, bom đạn ... Còn sắp nhỏ, con nít, dàn bà được cho ra ngòai chợ lánh 5..3 bữa về khi nó càn ác liệt.

The inhabitants here were very hardworking, when the enemies came, our soildiers fought the enemies, the inhabitants escaped. When the enemies went away, the inhabitants still came back and kept working on their gardens and fields . .. Some families had vaults, they could hide themselves in the vaults to avoid bombs, cartridges and shells.. . When the enemies raided so violently, women and children were brought aways some days to avoid them.

[295]

Int : Hồi đó có dùng máy móc như máy cày, máy bơm nước không?

Were the tractors and water pumps used?

Nông dân chỉ có trâu là chủ yếu. Sau này thời chống Mỹ một số người có vốn sắm máy cày đi cày mướn. Còn bơm nước thì dùng máy dầu, máy Kohler....

Farmers had mostly buffaloes. After that in the American time, some people who had money could buy pulled ploughs then had them rented. And they also used diesel water pumps, or Kohlers...

[303]

Int : Máy Kohler có ở đây năm nào?
When did Kohler appear here?

Thời 54..56, thời Mỹ.
In 54,56, in the American time.

Int : Người nào muốn mua cũng được, bán ở đâu?
Did you buy it freely? Where did people sell it?

Các công ty ở đây nó lãnh về bán. Lúc đó chưa xài phổ biến. Khoảng 60 sắp lên có đủ loại máy— Kohler,máy lớn....

They sold it here. It was not so popular at that time. Since 1960, there were more machines: Kohler, bigger machines...

[313]

Int : Thời đó năm 62, 63 mỗi gia đình đều có Kohler?
In 62, 63, did every family have Kohler?

Có hết.
Every did.

Int : Tức là máy Kohler thay đổi sinh hoạt và cuộc sống nhiều
That meant Kohler did change their life a lot?

Ờ dùng nhiều việc : phương tiện đi Đứng, bơm nước, đi mưa kéo dèn cũng được, gọn nhẹ, dễ sử dụng.
People used it in many things: Transporting, pumping water, lighting, it was small, not heavy, easy to use

Int : Đầu khí cũng dễ mua?
Was it easy to buy diesel

Dễ.
Easy

Int : Trước năm 56 không có ai có máy Kohler và phải chèo ghe, thóat nước bằng tay

Before 56, nobody had Kohler, you had to row your boat and water by hand, didn't you

Bằng gàu, bằng tay
By bamboo buckets, by hand.

Int: Sau khi có máy Kohler, đi chợ nhanh hơn?
After that when you had Kohler, you could travel faster, didn't you

Gấp 4..5 lần
4 or 5 times faster.

Int: Đi Vị Thanh từ đây bằng Kohler bao nhiêu phút?
How long did it take you to Vi Thanh from here by Kohler?

Chừng một tiếng.
About an hour.

[339]

Int: Những điểm thay đổi môi trường quan trọng từ thời cha mẹ ông đến nay
What have been the most important changes in the environment since your parents'time?

[Interviewer doesn't stop but lets continue]

Khoảng năm 41,42 tui khoảng 8..9 tuổi, đi học xã này và xã bên kia chỉ có một trường học ở Hỏa Lựu, dạy 3 lớp khoảng 90 học viên.
I was eight or nine years old in 1942, 1943... this village and that village had only one school in Hoa Luu, there were 3 classes with totally 90 learners.

Dường đi chỉ có một dường lộ ngo?ai thôị Trong này sình dất, đi theo lối mòn.
There was only one street out there.Here there were only paths.

Nhà cửa thưa thớt, da số là nhà chôn trên dất.
There were not many houses, mostly comtemporary houses.

Dời sống: ấp này khoảng 40 mấy hộ (lúc tui 8..9 tuổi). Số người đủ ăn hàng năm chừng 10 hộ. Ai có trâu bò, ruộng nương, là khá rồị Còn không có trâu bò, làm mướn thiếu ăn hết.
There were about 40 families living here when I was 8 or 9 years old. The number of families who had enough food to eat was about 10. It was Ok for the people who had buffaloes and fileds, but the ones who didn't have any had to work for the others and never had enough food to eat.
Hồi trước vất vả dữ lắm. Sáng đi làm sớm, mặt trời chưa mọc, tối có khi mặt trời lặn mới về tới nhà.
It was so miserable We started work early in the morning when the sun was not risen yet, and finished work at sunset.

[373]

Int : Buổi tối có cải lương giải trí không?
Was there cải lương for recreation in the evening?

Đâu có dàị Chỉ đòm mặt trời và nghe con cúm núm kêu Nó như con gà gáy thông canh, lúc

nào trời mưa không thấy mặt trời, nghe cúm núm kêu là biết trời tối
No radio We measure the time by the sunshine and the sound of a kind of bird called cúm núm. When it was raining, we couldn't see the sun, so we depended on the cum num. It sang when the evening came.

Int : Ông bà gặp nhau ở dây?
Did you and your wife meet each other here?
Vợ tui ở xã khác cách đây mười mấy cây số.
My wife came from another village which is ten kilometers far from here.

[384]

Int : Thanh niên ở đây giải trí tối thứ bảy như thế nào?
How did the young people here recreate
Thời trước không đi dâu Dường xá đâu có mà di, mần mệt rồi về. Muỗi dữ lắm. Dốt dèn dầu Có khi không có dầu, nghèo lắm. Tối lao dộng về mệt, ăn cơm, rồi nằm ngủ.
They didn't go anywhere.There were streets to go out, they just worked hard, got tired and stayed at home There were a lot of mosquitoes. We used oil lamps. Sometimes we didn't have oil to use. We were terribly poor. We were so tired after work already, so we went to bed after dinner.

[395]

Int : Không có diện lực?
Wasn't there electricity

Không, không có văn nghệ gì hết.
No, no recreation either.

(Mrs. Lau : hồi đó rừng không hà, cỏ rác không hà)
(Mrs. Lau: It was all jungles at that time)

Không có radio, sau này mới có.
No radio at that time, we have just had radio recently

[402]

Muốn lấy vợ chồng phải làm sao
How did people get married?

Mần mai (Bà Lau)
We had mate-maker (Mrs.Lau)

Có một người [mần mai] giới thiệu hai bên?
Did you have someone to introduce the 2 people ?

(Bà Lâu) Biết mặt nhau rồi, người ta mới dẫn lại cưới mình. (Ông Lâu) Phong tục tập quán cũng không đổi gì mấy, nhưng bây giờ đơn giản, chế nhiều..phải có người môi giới giới thiệu, bên trai có người môi giới qua bên gái, khi bên gái đồng ý, thì mới đặt làm dám, dám nói, rồi tiến hành dám cưới

(Mrs. Lau) After we met each other, the man's family came and proposed marriage The customs didn't change much, but now people are more simple In the past, there must be a mate-maker, the

man's side had someone come to the woman's side, when the woman's family agreed, they started to discuss the engagement and the weding.

Ông bà lấy nhau năm nào?
When did you get married?

Tui lớn tuổi mới cưới vợ, 28. Khỏang 1956.
I was not young when I got married, I was 28, that was in 1956.

[420]

Int: Thời kháng chiến, hai vợ chồng ở chung hay phải đi kháng chiến?
In the Resistance time, did you live together or did you have to join the Resistance?

Lúc chống Pháp chưa Vợ, tới năm 1956 là chống Mỹ mới có vợ. Qua năm là đi kháng chiến rồi, tới sau giải phóng mới về.
I wasn't married until the time fighting the Americans in 1956. One year later, I joined the Resistance until the day of Liberation in 1975.

Int : Trong thời cách mạng là vẫn phải làm ruộng?
Did you still work the fields in the Revolution time?

Vợ con ở nhà làm. Mướn hoặc mượn người làm.
My family continued the work while I was gone They hired or they asked other people to work with them.

[433]

Int : Ở chỗ khác cũng có dùng cây mù u làm dèn đầu mù ủ
In other places people used mu u as a lamp?

Ở Nam Bộ, nhất là thời kỳ 43, 44 lúc Nhật vô duổi Pháp, đầu lửa không có, ống quẹt dá không có, dốt dèn bằng trái mù ụ Chặt ra mỏng, phơi khô, xỏ lại, dốt. Cách khác là dùng mỡ heo dốt, mỡ chuột ... Tối dốt ăn cơm chút thôị Hồi đó không có ống quẹt, phải dùng hai cục dá khỏ cho nó văng lửạ Lấy miếng gòn để ở dưới...Gặp trời nắng mồ nó cháy nhanh, gặp trời mưa mồ hòai không cháy, có khi muốn nấu cơm sớm mà không có lửạ trễ.

In the South, especially in 43, 44, when the Japanese kicked the French out of Viet Nam, there was no diesel, no lighter, so we used mu u fruit as lamp. We cut the fruit into small pieces, and dried them, then burned them. Sometimes we used pig's grease or mouse fat to burn. We just used a while for dinner only. At that time we didn't have a lighter, we had to beat two pieces of stone to each other to get fire. We put some cotton under the two stones. When it was dry and sunny, we could get the fire easily, but when it was wet and rainy, we couldn't get fire, then we couldn't cook our meals as soon as I expected.

[469]

Sau 45 có dầu khí?
After 45, was there diesel ?

Cũng có nhưng rất ít. Đầu hỏa có trở lại Lúc đó quần áo vải cũng không có. Bấy giờ chỉ có mót vải mùng, vì lúc đó không còn ngủ mùng nữa. Vì lúc đó không ai sắm quần áo hết nên dồ cũ một hai ba năm rách

hết. Vải mùng để may quần áo cho dàn bà, dàn ông chỉ 1 cái quần cụt. Bao bố giặt sạch làm áo mặc, không có tay.

Yes, but not much. Diesel did come back. At that time we didn't even have clothes, we saved our mosquito nets for clothes, because at that time we didn't sleep in the mosquito nets any more. No one could buy new clothes, and our old clothes worn out and torn after 2 or 3 years. Mosquito nets were used to make outfits for women while men just wore shorts. We also washed sacks to wear as a shirt without sleaves.

[487]

Int : Mua vải ở đâu?
Where could you buy cloth ?

Không có vải, không có dầu, con người sanh bệnh chết nhiều (43,44,45,46) vì sốt rét, dịch tả, thiếu thuốc, thiếu ăn. [!!]

There was no cloth, no diesel, people died of diseases (in 43, 44, 45, 46) like malaria, cholera, they died because they didn't have food and medicines.

[498]

Int: Sau năm 46, kháng chiến nổ ra ở đây, cuộc sống saỏ
What was the life here after 46?

Dỡ hơn 1 chút chứ cũng còn rất khổ. Tới 49..50 lúc đó trở lại bình thường.
A little bit better, but still very miserable. It was OK again in 49, 50.

[505]

Năm 46 Việt Minh cấp dất?
Did Viet Minh grant land in 46?

Tới năm 50 mới cấp. Thời kỳ năm 45 rồi có ai làm địa chủ thì cứ làm nguyên, nhà nước không thâu thuế, nên dến năm 51 mới cấp ra ... Vi dụ Thời Pháp gia dình tui làm 10ha, sau này vẫn làm 10 hecta ... Tới 1951, mới tính lại số người trong gia dình là bao nhiêu, mới cấp cho người khác. Nên lúc sau này từ 49..50 về sau, ai cũng dều có đất tốt, nên mọi người dều khá. Chứ đất tốt hồi đó chỉ những người có phương tiện (trâu, bò, máy) mới có đất tốt. Hồi trước da số ruộng trúng thuộc về mấy người khá, còn người nghèo làm tay, thất thụ Nên khi cấp đất ai cũng có đất tốt, sau này đỡ.

That was in 50. After 45, the landlords were still landlords, they didn't have to pay tax untill 51. For example, in French time, my family had 10 ha, then we still worked on that 10 ha... Untill 1951, we kept enough land for every member in the family, then we gave others the rest. Since then, every one had good land to work, so everyone's life got better. Before that just the people who had buffaloes and machines had good land. Most of them had good harvests while the other poor people who had to work by hand didn't have enough food to eat. After beng granted land, every one had good land, life was better.

[528]

Int: Trong thời 51..52 Ở đây không đào kinh?
In 51, 52, didn't people dig canals here?

Ít đào ... Muốn đào phải đào bằng tay, không có xáng.
Not many. There weren't dredgers, we dug by hand.

Int: Khoảng 60..75 nạo vét kinh Xà Nỏ
In 60, 70 did people dredge Xa No canal?

1976 : Xà No + Nàng Mau (cách đây xa) hai kinh này lộ Vị Thanh chạy lên cách nhau khoảng 8 cây số.

In 1976: Xa No and Nàng Mau were about 8 km far from each other, they both went up to Vi Thanh.

Interview 8
Mr. Diệu
April 19, 2002
Vị Thanh Town
Vị Thanh District

[chú ý: Không rõ tên của Gressier. Ng được PV nói Am-Pê-rơ-sê, nhưng theo tài liệu, chú dồn điền này gọi Héritier Gressier. Trong cuộc PV này viết "Gressier".]

...

Sinh ra và lớn lên ở dây
I was born here, and grow up here.

[017]

Int: Vai trò của Vị Thanh đối với kinh Xà Nỏ
What is the role of Vi Thanh to Xa No canal?

Kinh Xà No khoảng hơn 100 tuổi, thời Pháp thuộc trước 45, dân sống bằng nghề nông nghiệp. Trải qua kháng chiến chín năm, chiến tranh tàn phá nhưng vẫn sống về nông nghiệp ... Thời chống Mỹ - Ngô Dình Diệm thành lập tỉnh Chương Thiện ở đây vì vị trí chính trị của nó là trung tâm điều phối quân sự, kinh tế, nông nghiệp của vùng đất U Minh (thuộc Tỉnh Cần thơ)

Xa No canal is about a hundred years old. Before 45, people lived by agriculture.During nine years of Resistance, they still lived by agriculture.In American time, Ngo Dinh Diem founded Chuong Thien here because this was the coordinate center of military, economics, and agriculture of U Minh (which belonged to Can Tho)

(Diệm muốn khống chế chiến tranh) không mở mang kinh tế, nông nghiệp gì hết. Chỉ có một chợ nhỏ ... Vị Thanh. Lúc 1975 vẫn tiêu điều xơ xác do chiến tranh. Chính phủ Việt nam (cách mạng) quyết dịnh xây dựng kinh tế nông nghiệp ở đây (mở ra thị trấn Vị Thanh). Giải quyết chống giặc đói, giặc dốt (xây trường học, bệnh viện). Qua thập niên thứ hai, nông nghiệp phát triển mạnh, đào kinh thủy lợi, đào dất, sổ phèn, học kinh nghiệm khoa học kỹ thuật để làm nông nghiệp (dạy dân học khuyến nông).

Diem wanted to control the war, so he didn't expand economics, agriculture.There was only one small market in Vi Thanh. In 1975, it was still very desolate and detitude because of the war. Then Vietnamese government decided to start agricultural economics here and they founded Vi Thanh town. They help fight against hunger enemy and illiteracy enemy by building school and hospital. In the next decade, agriculture strongly developed. People dug canals, purged alum, learned more about technology to work with agriculture.People also were taught more about agricultural extension.

[062]

Int: Thời Pháp có kinh rạch nào?
What canals were there in French time?

Ít thôi, toàn là đất liền, chỉ có Kinh Xà No, Kinh Trầm Cửa, Kinh Mương Lộ chạy qua bên Nàng Mau ... Và một số rạch khác như Rạch Trầm Cửa, Cái Nhúc, ...

Not many, all was land. There were only Xa No, Tram Cua, Muong Lo, Nàng Mau canals and ther

were some other arroyos like Tram Cua, Cai Nhuc...

Từ 1 đến 2 vụ sau giải phóng, bây giờ 3 vụ, đa số nông dân ở đây làm 1 ha đạt 7, 8, 9 tấn/ hạ Thời Pháp có mấy cái máy xay gạo Thời Ngô Dình Diệm, nó xây mấy cái nhà máy, và nhân dân bỏ tiền ra ... làm vài cái nhà máy lớn như nhà máy Tần Phong, nhà máy Vĩnh Phong trên tuyến kinh Xà Nọ

After Liberation, from one , we went to two crops per year, now we are doing three crops per year. Most of the farmers here could haverst from 7 to 9 ton/ hạ In French time, there were some rice husking mills. In Ngo Dinh diem time, he had the inhabitants pool money to build several factories like Tan Phong, Vinh Phong along Xa No canal.

[086]

Int: Người ở dài kinh Xã Xà No đến Cái Tư, Cái Lớn xay gạo ở Xà No hoặc Phụng Hiệp?
Did the people that lived along Xa no canal to Cai Tu husk their rice in Xa No or in Phụng Hiệp?

Xay ở Xà Nọ
In Xa Nọ

[092]

Int: Nàng Mau đào hồi nào?
When was Nàng Mau dug?

Hồi Ngô Dình Diệm. Từ hồi 1961. Nó cũng có vài nhà máy xay xát.
In Ngo Dinh Diem time. In 1961. There were also ssome rice husking factories.

Int: Trước Nàng Mau vùng đất tới Xà No là vùng đất ngập nước?
Before Nàng Mau, was the land to Xa No a flooded area?

Trước giải phóng và sau giải phóng, vùng này không phải đất ngập nước mà cũng không phải đất khô hạn. Vùng này mực nước cao nhất và thấp nhất cũng là 7, 8 tấc. Nên vượt thủy nhập điền quanh năm lúc nào cũng được. Muốn khô, muốn có nước dều được, vùng này trung hòa về nước.

Even before or after Liberation, this region was not wet or dry land. The highest water level in this region was 70 or 80 centimeters. It was so easy for us to work with the land at any time because the water level here was neutral.
...

[109]

Int: Vị Thanh trong thời kháng chiến là Khu Trù Mật?
Was Vi Thanh a dense area in Resistance time?

Thời Ngô Dình Diệm, Vị Thanh mở mang thành Tỉnh Chương Thiện, nhưng trước khi thành lập Tỉnh Chương Thiện cũng song song thành lập khu trù mật Vị Thanh- Hỏa Lựu Khu này do kiến trúc sư Ngô Viết Thụ thiết kế. Mục đích khu Trù Mật Ngô Dình Diệm là dồn dân bên ngòai vô khu Trù Mật này ... Nhà nước không cho gì ngòai vài ngàn đồng bạc để lên bốn công vườn. Nếu ai muốn vay thì cũng cho vay vài ngàn. Diệm muốn kiểm sóat an ninh và thanh lọc những người tham gia cách mạng.

In Ngo Dinh Diem time, Vi Thanh was expand to Chuong Thien Province, but before that, Diem had founded the agroville Vi Thanh- Hoa Luụ This area was designed by Ngo Viet Thu the architect. Ngo Dinh Diem's purpose was to drive the inhabitants from out side into this dense area. The governmnet didn't give anything except some thousand VNDongs to make 4 congs of garden. If people had wanted to borrow money, they could. Diem wanted to control the secrity and urge the revolutionists.

Int: Nếu người không sống gần ruộng, không bảo vệ ruộng, thì cũng không bảo vệ kinh tế?
But when people didn't live near the field, they couldn't protect the field and the economics.

Gom vô đây, nếu người nào ra ngòai làm ruộng được thì ra, không ra được tìm cách tự sống ở đây. Thứ nhất kiểm sát về an ninh. Thứ hai là phát triển kinh tế, nhưng hạn hẹp lắm, chưa thực hiện được.

He gathered people here, if any one could afford their agriculture, they could move out , if not, they had to find the way to survive here. First, Diem wanted to control the security, second, he wanted to develop the economics. However, he couldn't do that.

[133]

Int: Khu Trù Mật năm 1959?
Was the agroville in 1959?

Không, năm 60,61.
No, in 60 or 61.

Int: Mấy năm sau thay đổi như thế nào?
How did it change in some years later?

Mấy năm sau dân vô khu Trù Mật làm ăn, một số làm thương mại dịch vụ, phát triển tiểu thủ công nghiệp. Diệm + Thiệu xây dựng có mô hình thị trấn Vị Thanh tương dối khác, nhưng nó dặt tên là Chương Thiện. Phát triển thương mại, kinh tế, dịch vụ và tiểu thủ công nghiệp như nhà máy xay xát, phát huy lò dường chạy mía thủ công, làm ruộng xung quanh đây. Mua bán dịch vụ này nọ chứ không lớn lắm. Mục dích chính của Diệm và Thiệu là tập trung dân vô đây để kiểm sóat an ninh.

Some years later, people moved to the dense area to do business. Some started trading, some started small industries. Diem and Thieu founded a different model for Vi Thanh town, and named it Chuong Thien. They started to develop trading, business, services, and small industries like husking factories, sugar factories, and farming. Theye were just some small business and services, not so big. The main purpose of Diem and Thieu was gathering the people in here to control the security.

[144]

Int: Ở khu Trù Mật, gia dình, vợ chồng đi làm ruộng con có đi học không?
When living in the dense area, the family did farming, did the children have a chance to to go school?

Da số không học, nghèo Thiểu số đi học thôị Chế độ cũ không quan tâm dến dân sinh dân trí, chủ yếu tập trung dân về đây để kiểm soát an ninh, nhằm phục vụ cho chiến tranh. Còn phát triển kinh tế thì cũng có ít ít...

Most of them didn't go to school. They were poor. Some people went to school. The previous regime didn't care about education, they just wanted to drive the inhabitants here to control the security, which was good for the war. However, they did develop a little in economics.

(Ng được PV lặp lại 134.....144) The interviewee repeated...

[159]

Int: Khu Trù Mật có ảnh hưởng như thế nào về nông nghiệp? ... Những thay đổi của vùng gần khu Trù Mật khác với những thay đổi của vùng ở vùng căn cứ?

How did dense area influence agriculture? What were some changes of the place near the dense area in comparison with the place near the base area?

[180]

Không giống nhau Chung quanh khu Trù Mật, phổ biến phát triển nông nghiệp bằng lúa tăng vụ như IR26, gọi là lúa thần nông. Trong sâu thì vẫn giữ truyền thống làm 1 vụ.

Not the same. Around the dense area, agriculture developed more crops, mostly with IR26, which was called Than Nong. In rural parts, people still did only one crop.

[188]

Int: Vùng lúa Thần Nông gần khu Trù Mật, ai cấp dất, cấp đất cho ai?
Who granted the Than Nong region near the dense area, and to whom was it granted?

Đất của dân chiếm dụng từ xưa đến giờ. Đồng thời có một số đất Mỹ tước dọat của địa chủ (mua của địa chủ) và Diệm cấp lại cho dân.

That was the land that the inhabitants had been working for a long time. And there was also some land that the American bought from the landlords and Diem gave it to the inhabitants.

[194]

Int: Có một số địa chủ thời Pháp cũng là địa chủ vùng đất lúa Thần Nông? Vùng này Việt Minh cũng cấp đất cho người dịa phương.

Were there some landlords in the French time also the lanldlords of Than Nong region? Did Viet Minh grant land in this region to people?

Dúng.
That was true.

[202]

Int: Nếu người vùng này muốn làm đất và nếu lên căn cứ, Việt Minh cũng cấp đất cho họ?
If the people in this region wanted to farm, and to move to the base area, would Viet Minh give them land?

Cho.

Yes.
...

Int: Lý do người ta ủng hộ Việt Minh là vì ở khu Trù Mật không có đất ở, còn ở vùng căn cứ thì được cấp dất?
Did people support Viet Minh because they didn't have a place to live in the dense area while they were given land in the base area?

Dúng rồi, Việt Minh có đất mênh mông ở ngòai. Ai sống trong này không được thì ra ngòai vùng giải phóng sống, Nhà Nước cấp đất cho sản xuất nông nghiệp, tự do. Nhưng có một điều là Diệm + Thiệu chỉ giúp giống Thần Nông cho bà con xung quanh khu Trù Mật, còn vô sâu nữa nó không giúp! Nền nông nghiệp vùng này lúc đó phân ra làm hai giới tuyến. Vùng xung quanh khu Trù Mật (vùng tạm chiếm) làm vụ Thần Nông, vùng căn cứ (Việt Minh) theo nông nghiệp cổ truyền.

That's right. Viet Minh had a lot of land out side. People who couldn't live in here, could move to the liberated area to live, the governmnet gave land for agriculture freely. However, Diem and Thieu just helped Than Nong breed to the people living in and near the dense arrea, not to the people who lived farther. Agriculture in this region was divided into two areas: Around the dense area, people used Than Nong, in the base area, people followed the traditional agriculture.

[226]

Int: Vùng Kinh 8 Ngàn là đất của Gressier. Ông Gressier dến khoảng 1902, có đất vùng đó. Khi có Thần Nông, bên này có trồng Thần Nông hay đất này của Việt Minh?

Tam Ngan area was Gressier's land. He came here in about 1902. Did people use Than Nong here or was this the land of Viet Minh?

Tuyến kinh xáng Xà No từ Một Ngàn vô đây, khúc 14 Ngàn, 7 Ngàn dài khoảng một chục km, kể cả hai bên tuyến Xà Nọ Dồn điền lớn của người Tây gọi là [Pierre? Không rõ] Gressier, qua tới thời Việt Minh nắm quyền, truất hữu đất ấy và cấp lại cho dân. Máy lớn thời Pháp thuộc Gressier sử dụng, nhưng sau đó Việt Minh trưng dụng ruộng đất của ông và cấp cho dân từ ở Một Ngàn chạy dài vô tới Mười Bốn [Ngàn]. Thời đó tuyến dường này xa Chương Thiện, xa kiểm soát quốc gia, nông dân cũng rất nhạy bén, họ đi kiếm giống Thần Nông về tăng lên hai vụ. Vùng đất tuyến Xà No, đất đó là rất tốt.

Xa No canal was from Mot Ngan to here. From Muoi Bon Ngan, Bay Ngan , which was about ten kilometers, and the two sides of Xa No canal belonged to a French landlord called Gressier. When Viet Minh came, they took that land and granted it to the farmers. Gressier used big machines, but then Viet Minh gave them to people from Mot Ngan to Muoi Bon Ngan. It was far from Chuong Thien, far from American's control, the farmers were clever, too, they bought Than Nong and increased the crops to two. The land in Xa No was so good.

[248]

Int: Nghe nói hồi trước người Khơ me khai thác đất đó?
It was said that the Khmers cleared that waste land?

Không phải, người Khơ me ở vùng này hiếm hoi, ít lắm. Từ hồi Pháp tới giờ, đất này là của dồn điền Gressier, tá điền là người Việt nam, cũng có vài người tá điền là người Khơ me làm việc cho Gressier.

No, that's not true. There were not many Khmer people here.This land belonged to Gressier since the French time. And the ternants were Vietnamese. There also some Khmer ternants working for Gressier.

Int: Gressier có khoảng bao nhiêu hà
How many hectares did Gressier have?

Nhiều lắm cả trăm ngàn ha! Từ 1/2 kinh Nàng Mau tới dậy Từ Xà No lên Nàng Mau 7.....8 km, nhưng dồn điền Gressier vô tới phân nửa.

A lot ! Hundreds of hectares! From the final half of Nàng Mau to here. From Xa No to Nàng Mau was 7 or 8 kilometers, but Gressier's land was half of that.

[262]

Int: Vùng đó không làm khu Trù Mật, mà Việt Minh cấp dất?
Wasn't that land the dense area but the land that Viet Minh granted to people?

Việt Minh cấp đất cho dân, dân làm thấy Thần Nông phổ biến, họ ra ngòai này kiếm mua, họ mang về làm phát triển cũng tốt, cùng được.
Viet Minh granted land to people, the people liked Than Nong, they came here to buy it and did it in their place. It was good.

[268]

Làm Thần Nông cho Việt Minh?
Did people use Than Nong for Viet Minh?

Cho Việt Minh.
For Viet Minh.

Int: Chế độ Sài gòn không kiểm sóat được?
Could Sai Gon regime control that?

Không. ... Ai mua giống cũng được, người bán lúa ở đây ai mua cũng bán.
No, everyone could buy the breed, the shops sold it to everyone.

[283]

[So sánh lúa thần nông với lúa truyền thống]
[Comparing Than Nong rice and traditional rice]

Lúa Thần Nông làm trúng hơn nhưng kỹ thuật hơi khó làm. Phải thâm canh, phân bón... Lúa cổ truyền 1 vụ dễ làm, nhưng mà không trúng.
Than Nong gave good harvest but it was difficult to do it. We should use fertilizers. One crop traditional rice was easy to do, but the harvest wasn't good.

[290]

Int: Ví dụ có một người Việt Minh làm đất của Gressier, muốn làm lúa Thần Nông, mua lúa và phân bón ở Vị Thanh hết bao nhiêu tiền?

For example, one Viet Minh person worked on Gressier land, and he wanted to use Than Nong, how much should he spend buying rice and fertilizers in Vi Thanh?

Nhiều tiền. Tuy họ theo Việt Minh, nhưng vợ con vẫn ở ngòai mua lúa và phân bón được. Vì trong lúc đó Diệm kiểm sóat không chặt chẽ nên ai mua gì ở ngòai dem vô trong dều được hết.
A lot. Though they followed Viet Minh, their families still live out side, and they could buy rice and fertilizers. Diem didn't control so strictly, so people could bring in anything.

[306]

Int: Trong những năm 60 ở đây có người Mỹ không?
During 60s, were there any American here?

Có nhóc hết, cố vấn [MACV] Mỹ cũng lại đây. Cố vấn cho vấn đề quân sự, phục vụ chiến tranh, cũng có một vài cố vấn về nông nghiệp, nhưng ít.

A lot. American consultants came here to help millitary, a little bit of agriculture. ...

Tui có gặp, vì tui làm nông nghiệp cũng làm quen biết nhiều ở ty nông vụ. Ty nông vụ có nhiệm vụ cấp giống Thần Nông cho nhân dân ở khu Trù Mật bán phân bón và một số ít thuốc bảo vệ thực vật, bán giống Thần Nông, và nó cũng cho một số dụng cụ cầm tay phục vụ nông nghiệp như leng cuốc. Nó hướng dẫn cho mình trồng lúa nhưng Đại khái thôi chứ không như mấy ông cách mạng bây giờ dạy rất kỹ. Bây giờ làm chắc ăn lắm. Hồi xưa tụi nó dạy lớt lớt không hà, nông dân có người làm trúng, có người thất bỏ mạng, vì sâu rầy phá hoại nặng, chịu không nổi.

I met them, because I worked with agriculture, so I know many people at Agriculture Bureau. Agriculture Bureau had the duty to give Than Nong breed to people in the dense area, to sell fertilizers and pesticides, and agricultural tools... The guys instructed us how to grow rice but they didn't do as carefully as the Revolution people are doing nowadays. Now, we are sure of our field work. In the past, those guys didn't teach us carefully, so some people got good harvests, some didn't. Lots of pests damaged crops, too. We could not stand them.

[330]

Int: Họ có giới thiệu máy Kohler, như thế nào?
How did they introduce Kohler?

Thời đó xài máy của Mỹ chứ không có máy của Nhật, máy Kohler, BS [Briggs & Stratton], có máy được ai cũng thích. Kể cả máy ông Việt Minh cũng mua máy về xài.

We used American machines like Kohler, BS, everyone liked them. Even the Viet Minh people bought them.
...

[350]

Int: Trước máy Kohler như thế nào?

How was it before Kohler?

Dân xài máy cổ lỗ sĩ của Pháp, máy bơm... nhưng ít lắm. Sau đó khỏang 80% nông dân xài máy Kohler để phục vụ nông nghiệp! Kể cả vùng tạm chiếm của quốc gia lẫn vùng giải phóng của Việt Minh.

People used the old French machines like water pumps, but not so much. Then about 80% people in this village used Kohler for agriculture ! Even in the dense area and liberal area of Viet Minh!

[364]

Int: Mỗi gia dình dều có máy?

Did everyone have machines?

8/10 gia dình có máy

8/10 families had machines.

...

[375]

Int: Thời những năm cuối 30...40 có một số công trình lớn như Mỹ Phước của người Pháp, gọi là Casier Tonkinois, vùng Tứ Giác Long Xuyên. Nông nghiệp thay đổi như thế nào trong thời người Nhật ở đây (41,42)?

At the end of 30s, 40s, there was My Phuoc (Casier Tonkinois) , and Long Xuyen... How did agriculture change when the Japanese lived here?

Trươc 45 DBSCL có mấy dồn điền lớn như dồn điền Tây ở Cờ Đỏ, dồn của Hùynh Kỳ, Kinh Xà No có dồn của Gressier, ở Bạc Liêu cũng có dồn điền Tây Những dồn điền đó tương dối có kỹ thuật, máy móc, máy bơm, máy cày Lần lần những điền này khóan trắng cho nông dân mướn đất ruộng mua trâu về cày làm, chứ không có máy móc gì. Thời đó nông nghiệp cũng phát triển theo khung, khung nào có dồn điền thì phát triển được. [khung = casier = rectangular plan]

Before 45, there was some big plantations like Co Do of Huynh Ky in the Mekong Delta, of Gressier in Xa No, some other French plantations in Bac Lieu.. They all had tecnology, machinery, water pumps, pulled plough. Then the landlords lent the land to the farmers, and the farmers bought buffaloes to plough on their fields, they didn't have machines. At that time agriculture develped up to the feature of each rectangular plan. The ones which had plantations developed faster than the others.

[404]

Int: Sau đó, chế dộ Pháp cấp đất hay đất này thuộc một người điền chủ?
After that, did the French regime grant land or did this land belong to a landlord?

Những dồn điền đó do Pháp khai khẩn, cho chính phủ Pháp, ví dụ như Anh Gressier khai khẩn mấy ngàn ha vùng này, mở rộng dồn điền, đào kinh giáp vòng, xẻ như bàn cờ.
These plantations were assayed by the French for the French government. For example, the guy Gressier cleared some thousand hectares in this region, expanded the plantations, dug canals around like the chess board.

[416]

Int: Khai khẩn xẻ hình vuông?
Was it laid out in a square shapẻ

Trong hình vuông nó xẻ kinh ngang, kinh xuôị

In that square shape, the guys cut the canals across and down.

[418]

Về thủy lợi là tốt? Khung tốt?

Was the hydraulics good? Were the rectangular plans good?

Tốt, có thể hơn bây giờ (vẽ bản dồ)
Good, may be better than that now. (mapping)
...

Vì dồn điền Gressier, xả kinh xuôi, kinh ngang. Đây là kinh Xà No, đây là 7 Ngàn, có nhà máy lớn của Gressier, kẻ từ 1 Ngàn dến 14 Ngàn dều có kinh hết, lên đây 1 ngàn mét là có kinh đi vộ

Gressier's plantations cut the canals across and down. This was Xa No, this was Bay Ngan, there was a big factory of Gressier... There were canals along Bay Ngan to Muoi Bon Ngan, up here bout one thousand meters, there was a canal that led in.

[435]

Vô đây 1 ngàn mét là có kinh bọc hậu, 2000m. Tất cả nước đưa vô khung này, mấy vàm kinh này dều có đập hết, dẫn nước vộ Nó cần dem nước vô thì nó để mặt bọng này ở phía trong, lúc xả nước ra không cho nước ngòai vô thì để mặt bọng phía ngòạ

Coming in here about a thousand meters, there was a two thousand meter periphery canal. All the water was conducted through this rectangular plan, and all these canals had dikes. A one-way gate was turned in when they wanted to bring water in, and it was turned out when they wanted to rinse water out.
...

Lúc gần thu hoạch lúa, nó xả nước ra cho khô đồng để cho lúa chín quay mặt bọng ra ngòạ Nước ròng chảy ra được mà nước lớn vô kinh không được. Nhưng hệ thống hòan hảo ở chỗ giáp vòng hết. Muốn nước khô, muốn có nước dều được.
The one-way gate was turned out when the havest came to rinse water out and help dry the field. Just during low tide could water go out but at high tide it couldn't come in. The system was perfect because it covered the whole area They could decide the field to be dry or wet easily

[456]

Dồn Gressier từ Một Ngàn dến 14 Ngàn, nhà máy là 7 Ngàn.
Gressier station was from Mot Ngan to Muoi Bon Ngan, the factory was at Bay Ngan.

Int: Rất khoa học, có nhà máy lớn ở giữa.
Very scientific, there was a big factory in the midlẹ

[462]

Bảy Ngàn giờ thuộc [huyện] Châu Thành A, Cần thợ..Tui thấy hệ thống này hay lắm.
Bay Ngan now belonged to Chau Thanh A , Can Thọ I think this was a good system.

Int: Vùng này Việt Minh chiếm khoảng năm nào?
When did Viet Minh take this region?

Bắt đầu từ 1945, Gressier zọt về xứ luôn, về Sài gòn, rồi về Pháp luôn. Tòan bộ đất này là Việt Minh truất hữu trên tay người Pháp cấp lại cho dân.
At the beginning of 1945, Gressier ran home, he went to Saigon, then to France.The whole area here was taken from the French by Viet Minh to give to farmers.

Máy [xay gạo] này năm 45, khi Gressier rút đi rồị Tây vô dánh Việt Minh, Gressier vẫn còn quản lý nhưng không hoạt dộng bao nhiêụ Vì ở đây có một dồn khổng lồ. Tới giải phóng rồi mới giải phóng chỗ này Coi như chế dộ Pháp chuyển qua chiến tranh Việt Mỹ, chỗ này là căn cứ quân sự của Mỹ, của chế dộ Sài gòn, vẫn chiếm giữ tới năm 1975, thành ra nhà máy này có nhưng không hoạt dộng, ở trong không có thiết bị, nó gỡ bán hết trọi rồị Chỉ là dồn và căn cứ quân sự.

This husking machine was in 1945. When Gressier went away, the French came to fight Viet Minh, Gressier still managed affairs [from Saigon] but the factory did not work much. There was a huge station here.Until liberation, this place was freẹ This place was the base area of the French (before) and the America (later) till 1975. The factory existed, but it didn't work, there was no equipment in side, the guys sold everything out already It was only used as a station and a military basẹ

[495]

Int: Hiện nay là nhà vẫn còn là nhà máy xay gạỏ
Is it still the husking factorỷ

Sau giải phóng là nhà máy xay gạo của công ty lương thực Tỉnh Hậu Giang, Huyện Châu Thành.
After Liberation, it became the husking factory of the Hau Giang Food Company in Chau Thanh.

[500]

Int: Những người hồi trước làm tá điền của Gressier, sau đó Việt Minh cấp dất.....?
Did Viet Minh give land to the people who were Gressier's ternants?

Không đồng dều, người nhiều, người ít ...
Not equally, some had a lot, some had less than others.

Int: Việt Minh cấp đất bằng cách nào?
How did the Viet Mnh people grant land?

Truất hữu, rồi cấp lại cho dân. Ví dụ: hồi đó ông A mướn của Gressier 100 công, tới thời Việt Minh cứ làm 100 công và đóng thuế nông nghiệp cho Việt Minh.
Deposing their right first, then taking the land and giving to the farmers. For example, at that time Mr. A rented a hundred congs of land from Gressier> In Viet Minh time, he still worked on that land and paid agricultural tax to Viet Minh.

[510]

Int: Vậy Việt Minh có một thống kê theo Gressier của những người mướn đất của địa chủ?
So, did Viet Minh have a list of the people who rented land from the landlords?

Ừ. Yeah.

Int: Trong thời Việt Minh tới đây năm 45, sau khi cấp dất, người nào làm phải trả thuế nông nghiệp cho Việt Minh?
When viet Minh came here in 1945, after being granted land, did every one who used land have to pay agricultural tax to Viet Minh?

Trả bằng lúa hoặc tiền.
Paying either by rice or money

Int: So sánh việc thuế đất của địa chủ và đóng thuế cho Việt Minh như thế nào?
How could you compare the tax paid for the landlords and the tax paid for Viet Minh?

Hồi trước nông dân mướn đất của địa chủ Pháp. Nếu anh mướn 100 công (10ha). Gressier cho vay 100 dến 200 gia lúa. Nếu người nào không vay nhiều thì vay ít. Thực phẩm để ăn để làm 100 công ruộng này, nó bán chịu (nước mắm, đầu lửa, vải.....) thực phẩm và dụng cụ nông nghiệp được bán chịu cho tá điền, tới mùa thu hoạch trả bằng lúa. Trả lúa! Đồng thời cũng phải đóng thuế nông nghiệp cho Gressier. Như vậy so ra, dời sống nông dân thấy ổn dịnh, nhưng thực sự làm không có dư, lý do là hàng nó bán dã hút hết số lúa này rồi, và nó lấy thuế nông nghiệp là hại Người nông dân làm rồi chỉ còn lại chút dinh.
Before that, farmers rented land from the French landlords. If you rented a hundred congs (100 ha), Gressier could lend to 100 or 200 gia of rice.Everyone borrowed rice from them. We could buy fishsauce, diesel, cloth or tools from the guy and paid later. When the harvest came, we paid by rice.And, we also ad to pay tax for him. So, our life looked stable, but we actually couldn't save up at all. The reason was that we owed him so much, we had to pay all the debt and pay the tax at the same time. The farmers just had some rice left .

[564]

Qua thời này, Việt Minh cấp đất cho nông dân trên dồn điền Gressier, người nông dân chỉ đóng khỏan thuế nông nghiệp, tương dối nhẹ, ngòai ra không còn gì nữa hết, nên nông dân làm có dự Với lại bây giờ áp dụng kỹ thuật nông nghiệp làm lúa tăng vụ, vùng dồn điền Gressier này làm 3 vụ không. Tính ra 1 công làm được 30..60 giạ lúa. Mùa này là 60 giạ/công. Rất rõ ràng. Tính trên tấn, 1 ha gần 10 tấn.

In their time, Viet Minh gave land to people on Gressier's plantation. Then the farmers just needed to pay agricultural tax, which was not heavy They didn't have to pay anything else, so they could save up easily. Moreover, people started to do 3 crops per year. One cong has been giving 30 to 60 gia of rice. This crop has given 60 gia/cong. Very clear. One hecta gives about 10 tons of rice.

Int: Trong thời Việt Minh, những người làm dồn điền cũ này giàu lắm? Được làm đủ tiền ... để xây nhà, mua máy, mua đất khác, cho con đi học Đại học?

In Viet Minh time, were the people who continued to work on the old plantation very rich? They had money, they could build their houses, buy machines, buy more land, and support their children's college life...

Dúng rồi! Từ thời Việt Minh cấp đất tới giờ, người nông dân ở vùng dồn điền khá giả hết rồi, 3 vụ đều trúng, không sưu cao thuế nặng, làm được bao nhiêu để cho mình ăn hết, đóng thuế nông nghiệp chỉ một phần, năm nào cũng dự Ông thấy hai bên kinh Xà No, từ 14 Ngàn chạy về 1 Ngàn, nhà kiên cố, nhà tường mọc như nấm, một số người có tiền cho con đi học ở Đại học Cần thơ, ra Cần thơ mua đất cất nhà cho con ở.

Yes, that's true. Since Viet Minh gave land, farmers' life got better. The three harvests are all good. No heavy tax. We could take all the products that we produce.We only pay a little for tax. Every year, we can ad more to our budget. You see, from Muoi Bon Ngan to Mot Ngan, the two sides of Xa No canal, there are as many stable houses, cement houses as mushrooms ! Lots of people can support their children to study at Can Tho University, and they can even buy land or houses in Can Tho for their children.

[610]

Int: ... Việc phát triển sau khi Việt Minh cấp dất, ảnh hưởng tốt dến kinh tế Vị Thanh?
Did the development after Viet Minh granted land possitively influence the economics in Vi Thanh?

Dúng, sau khi nông dân có đất và được nhà nước hướng dẫn canh tác theo kỹ thuật mới ảnh hưởng tốt cả vùng này..
That's right. That farmers had land and was taught new technology strongly helps the whole region.

Int: Ngày xưa đất vùng này của Phong Dinh hay Chương Thiện?
Did this land belong to Phong Dinh or Chuong Thien?

Thuộc Tỉnh Phong Dinh.
To Phong Dinh.
...[thảo luận] [discussion]

Mặt B :

[004]

Int: Ở đây co một phi trường...
Ther was an airport here...

Hồi Tỉnh Chương Thiện có 1 phi trường phục vụ cho quân sự chứ không cho dân sự. Nó phục vụ chiến tranh.
Chuong Thien had an airport that served for military purpose, not for civil affairs. It just served the war. [chỉ bản dồ...] [poiting at the map]

[043]

Int: Cái này không ảnh hưởng chợ ?
Didn't this influence the market?

Không. Đây là phục vụ quân sự Mỹ. Lúc đó có cơ quan cố vấn của quân đội Mỹ gọi là USOM. Cơ quan này điều phối cả phi trường lẫn tiểu quân Chương Thiện.
No this just served American military At that time, there was an American consulting department called USOM. This department manneuvered both the airport and Chuong Thien army force.

Int: Có người nước ngòai nghiên cứu nông nghiệp không?
Were there any foreigners studying the agriculture here?

Chỉ có người Mỹ giúp đỡ ty nông vụ và giúp về kỹ thuật trồng Thần Nông. Người nước ngoài không vô đây để kinh doanh gì hết. Bởi vì chỗ này hồi xưa ớn lắm! Chiến tranh, giặc giã không, pháo kích ngày nào cũng "dùng ì" "dùng ì" ... Mấy cha Việt Cộng bắn vô, ở trong này đi ra khủng bố ... trời ơi! ... Tôi sống được tới bây giờ không biết là phước bao lớn! Ghê lắm! Chứ không phải chuyện thường. Chỗ này là chỗ khói lửa...Hồi xưa, ở trên thủ đô Sai Gòn, sĩ quan hay lính nào mà nghe nói bị đối về Chương Thiện là nó sợ gần chết! Chỗ này là chỗ chiến tranh 24 / 24!

Just the Americans, they came to help with the Agriculture Bureau and the technology to grow Thần Nông [IRRI High-Yield Rice, then IR26]. No foreigners came here for business, because this place was so dangerous! War and bombs happened every day. Their Việt Công "fathers" shot in, and the Americans got out to terriorize...Oh my God!...I survived to now thanks to the best luck! So terrible! It was not a normal thing! This place was like a bombing range. At that time, in the Sài Gòn capital, an American soldier could die of fright if he heard he was going to Chuong Thien! The war here was 24/24!

Int: Về người Mỹ ở sân bay...
About the American people at the airport...

Họ không có đi bậy. Họ đi vòng vòng ở chợ này và họ lên phi trường không. Phải có "corp" [MP] theo.

They didn't travel freely. They just went around the market and sometimes went to the airport, usually they had guards follow them.

Int: Kinh Xà No gặp sông Cần thở
Did Xa No meet Can Tho river?

Sông Cần Thơ chạy vô Ba Láng tới Vàm Xáng Xà No rồi quẹo vô Phong điền.
Can Tho river ran to Ba Lang , then to Xa No, then turned to Phong Dien.

[089]

Mỗi km có một con kinh vô trong 14km của Gressier, xưa đào thủ công bằng tay Gressier mướn dân dào, riêng. Kinh Xà No, Pháp múc bằng xáng cạp gọi là xáng lạ
Xáng lớn được kéo về Mỹ thọ Xáng lớn ngày xưa cũng được dùng để móc cái Xà No này
At every kilometer, there was a canal of 14 km long of Gressier. He had the inhabitants dig those canals. Xa No canal was dug by the French, they used dredgers to dig it. The big dredger in My Tho was also used to dig Xa No canal.

Interview 9
Mr. Tự (96 Yrs Old)
April 20, 2004
Vị Thủy Commune
Vị Thanh District

[Vì Ông Tư bị lãng tai, nên khó giao tiếp. PV này chỉ ghi tóm tắt.]
[Mr. Tu is hearing impaired, difficult to communicate This interview is summarized.]

Cốt cựu ở dây
I've been living here all my life

[019]

Lúc tui nhỏ ở đây rừng rú, không có dường di, chỉ đi lòn trong rừng.
When I was a child, this place was jungles, there wasn't a road , we traveled through the jungles.

Nhà cửa thưa thớt. 2, 3 cây số mới có nhà. Cha mẹ làm ruộng. Nước mặn, làm ruộng không trúng. Nếu trúng lắm là 12..13 giạ, còn hạng 7..8 giạ là nhiều Thấp nữa là 3..4 giạ.
It was thinly populated, there was a house every 2 or 3 kilometer. My parents were field workers. The water was salty, the harvests were very bad. 12 or 13 gia per cong was considerd a good harvest, mostly we harvested 7 or 8 giạ It could be lower, 3 or 4 giạ

[040]

Dời sống ngày xưa chật vật, nghèo Một lạc (xã) có hai ba nhà khá thôi Lượm củi bán, làm ruộng 2...3 công ăn thôi Rừng không hà.
Life at that time was hard and poor. In a village, there were just 2 or 3 OK families. We earned a living by picking up the small tree branches in the jungle and selling them or we worked in the field , about 2 or 3 cong only Jungles everywhere

[047]

1950 Cách mạng đào kinh bề ngang 2...3 thước, một xã có hai ba kinh. Không có thông như bây giờ.
Revolution people dug canals 2 or 3 meters wide, a village had 2 or 3 canals. The canals were not as connected to each other as they are nowadays.

[057]

Int: Về Thú vật?
About animals?

Cò, cọp. Thời ông cha về dựng nhà thờ là còn cọp. Thời tôi biết tới giờ là không có con voi Có cọp trong rừng.

Storks, tigers. There were still tigers at the time the priest came here to build the church. As far as I've seen, there has been no tigers in the jungles at all.

Int: Có loại cây nào?

What kinds of trees were there?
Tràm, dước, chẹt, trắc và một số cây tạp.
Cajuput, mangrove, chet, kingwood and some other poor quality kinds.

Int: Làm gì trong rừng?
What could people do in the jungles?

Đi vô rừng dốn củi, cưa cây, chất dống mang đi bán ... Không có thợ thầy, đóng tủ đóng bàn ghế gì hết! Ở đây không có!
Going to the jungles and cutting trees, sawing them and bulking them and then selling them... there wasn't any carpenter ! there wasn't !

[080]

...

Ông già tui đi vô rừng dốn cây cưa khúc để đó ghe vô mua Người ta ngày xưa khờ lắm, nuôi heo cũng không biết bán. Ghe Gia Dịnh xuống, nó mua heo, vác lên, nói bao nhiêu bán bao nhiêu..Không biết cân, không biết bán gì hết trơn á.

My father cut trees in the jungles and sawed them, then a small boat came and bought the wood. We were kind of silly at that time, we raised some pigs, but we didn't know how to sell them. The Gia Dinh boat came down and bought the pigs, they lifted a pig and said a price, and we sold them up to how much they wanted to buy We didn't know how to scale, how to sell at all !

Int: Nuôi heo ở đâu?
Where did you raise the pigs?

Người ở đây, nhưng ít người nuôi heo lắm.
People here did, but not many

Int: Về nhà cửa ngày xưa...
About houses at that time?...

Xóm này hồi tui nhỏ 3..4 cây số mới có một chòm 3...4 cái nhà sàn để ở dốn củi bán. Tàu xuống chở củi, đi xuống 12.....13 chiếc chài có tàu dòng . Tàu dòng củi về đâu Sài gòn Gia dịnh....
When I was small, this village just had 3 or 4 wooden houses every 3 or 4 km, people lived there to cut the trees in the jungles. Boats came down to buy woods, they came in group of 12, 13 big boats with carriers following at the back. They carried the woods bak to Sai Gon, Gia Dinh...

Int: Thời dinh cư ở đây, khẩn đất như thế nào?
When settling, how did people clear waste lands?

Thời dinh cư ở đây, phải đi khẩn dất, địa chủ có đất từ trước rồi, nhiều lắm... Dân cũng vào rừng, khẩn dất, một người vài trăm công. ...

When settling, we had to assart, the landlords had land before already, a lot... We also went to jungles to assart, several hundred cong per person.

Ai không có đất thì mướn của địa chủ. Mướn 100 công, Tết phải mang 1 giạ gạo trắng, mướn 50

công phải mang 1 táo và 1 cặp vịt. Còn người nghèo không có, lại làm công cho địa chủ, 1 người 5 ngày, không làm nó đuổi.

If you didn't have lands, you had to rent the lands form the landlords. If you rented 100 cong, you had to gift them 1 gia of your best rice on Tet, if you rented 50 cong, you had to gift them 1 tao of your best rice and a pair of duck. If you were too poor to be able to have anything to gift them , you had to work without paying for 5 days, if you didn't do that, they will kick you out of the village

[128]

Int: Săn bắt có phải nộp cho địa chủ không?
Did you have to gift them anything from your hunting?

Không có. [Con của Ông Nhân] Cá bắt tự do, không phải nộp. Cá lóc, cá trệ Nước hồi đó có mùa : nắng mặn, mưa (nhờ nước ngọt trên nguồn) ngọt.
Nọ (Mr. Nhan's son). You could catch fish freely, you don't need to gift them. Loc, tre.At that time, the water had 2 seasons: it was salty in the dry season and fresh in the rainy season.

Int: Làm ruộng trong mùa mưa, phải không?
You did your crop in rainy season, did you

Lúa một vụ, bắt mạ từ tháng 5 âm lịch dến tháng chạp. Từ tháng chạp sắp lên là có nước mặn lần lần. (Hiếu) Ngày trước hai mùa rõ rệt : mưa và khộ Ngày nay thời tiết bất thường.
1 crop, rowing rice seeds from the fifth month to the twelveth month. From the twelveth month , we had fresh water. (Hieu) there were 2 seasons: dry and rain. Now the weather is changeable

[150]

[Con của Ông Nhân giải thích công việc của Ng PV]...
[Mr. Nhan's son explains the interviewer's purpose]

Int: Về thay đổi dất?
About the changes of the lands?

Cha mẹ tui không có dất, sau này thời cách mạng, nhà nước cấp cho tui một miếng. Hồi đó một nhà khá giả có 9...10 tên bạn (ở dợ). Bây giờ không có.

My parents didn't have any lands. Then in the Revolution time, the government granted me a piece of land. A rich family at that time might have 9 or 10 servants. Now, not any more.

[168]

Int: Việc làm lúa...
About growing rice...

...Lúa trước kia làm một vụ, sau này lên 2...3 vụ. Từ năm 1985 dến nay làm 3 vụ.
We had 1 crop before, then 2, and 3 crops. We have had 3 cops since 1985.

Thời chiến tranh đất xấu, bị phèn. Ngày xưa một công 2...3 giạ. Giờ một công 30 giạ, nhờ đào xẻ kinh.
In the time of the war, the land was bad and had alums. 1 cong gave 2 or 3 gia only, now 1 cong gives 30 gia , thanks to the canals.

Ông Huy, con rể Ông Tự
Mr. Nguyen van Huy, Mr. Tự's son in law.

Int : Thủy lợi đầu thế kỷ 20 đến nay
How about irrigation since the beginning of the 20th century
Ít kinh, từ hồi cách mạng đánh Pháp, khai kinh từ từ, từ hồi đánh Mỹ khai kinh nhiều hơn, để dân có đất canh tác.
There were few canals. Since the revolution fighting against the Frech, they gradually dug canals, and then in the time fighting the American, more canals were dug for us to cultivate

Int: Rừng thời chống Mỹ ?
How about jungles in the fighting the American time?
Hết rừng rồi Nhưng đất bỏ hoang nhiều
They were all gone But there were a lot of abandoned lands.

[227]

Int: Đất bỏ hoang là gì?
What is abandoned land?
Đất hoang là đất không làm gì được (đất ngập nước). Chỉ có cỏ. Cỏ mọc và để dành nuôi trâu
Abandoned land was the land that you could not do anything with it, because they were wetland. Just grass in it. Grass could be used for raising water buffaloes.

Int: Chim nhiều không?
Were there a lot of birds?
Cò, Vạc, Chằng tè (đã biệt tích).
Stocks, betterns, chang te (Chang te is extinct now.)

Int: Có nuôi cá không?
Did people raise fish?
Cá : không cần nuôi, ở trên rừng xuống ruộng, không có người bán. Cá nhiều lắm. Bắt ăn không hết nữa. Lúa làm một vụ nên cá lên sanh đẻ được. Giờ làm nhiều vụ nên không có cá.

No need to raise fish, they came down the fields from the jungles. There was a lot. You could never eat them up. One crop helped the fish spawn. Now many crops make the fish go away

[250]

Int: Thay đổi môi trường?
How about the changes of the environment?

Môi trường thay đổi tốt lắm. Bởi vì kinh khai nhiều, đất phì nhiêu, không có đất bỏ hoang...
Positive change, because there are more canals, rich lands, no abandoned lands.

Int: Hiện nay không có cò, chim, cá nhiều
Now there are not many birds, fish?

Không còn chim, co, cá vì không còn rừng. Thuốc sâu và lúa nhiều vụ làm cá không ở được.
No birds, storks, or fish because all jungles have gone Pesticides and many rice crops make it

imposible for the fish to live

[262]

Int: Môi trường xưa và nay
Couldyou compare the environment in the past and now?
Nay tốt hơn nhiều Nhưng môi trường bây giờ nước bị pha thuốc nhiều
Now it is much better. But water environment now is very chemical.

Int: Kinh Nàng Mau đào khi nào?

When was Nàng Mau dug?
[Ông Tư] Mr. Tu

Hồi đó gọi là kinh Xáng, có một con lộ chạy đi Vị Thanh, dến khi múc kinh Xáng thì dứt con lộ. Tui cũng làm cu li cho làm cầu Nàng Mau [Ông Huy] Kinh Xáng do múc 80 ... 90 năm rồi, tui không rõ. Ba tui kể lại dân nghèo bị bắt đi mần. [Ông Tư] Hồi đó dân nghèo bị bắt đi mần hoài à ...

It was called Xang canal. There was a road straight to Vi thanh, and this road was erased when the canal was dug. I was a worker for Nàng Mau bridge construction. [Mr. Huy] this canal was dug 80 or 90 years ago.. My father told us that the poor were forced to work in this construction. [Mr.Tu] at that time the poor were constantly forced to work ...

Int: Kinh Xáng?
Canal?

Kinh Xáng Nàng Mau từ Vị Thủy đi Cái Lớn múc được 80....90 năm (Kinh Vĩnh Chèo) Hồi tui 18 ...19 tuổi là đi làm cu li đào kinh này

Nàng Mau canal form Vi thuy to Cai lon was dug 80 or 90 years ago (Vinh Cheo canal). When I was 18, 19 years old, I work for this digging .

[307]

Int: Sau khi đào kinh, thủy lợi có ảnh hưởng như thế nào?
After digging the canal, how was the irrigation influenced?

[Ông Huy] Mr. Huy

Thay đổi mà điều ít lắm: hồi trước mũi nước ngọt người ta nhắm hướng đưa nước ngọt về nhờ kinh Xà No và Nàng Mau Tiếp thu rồi đắp ngọn rừng ngã 5 nên nước ngọt luôn. Hồi đó muốn có nước ngọt, dợi nước ròng xuống phải đi chở ở Sà Sắt, Nàng Mau

Some small changes: Before, they dug Xa No and Nàng Mau to move fresh water here.After 1975, thanks to diking the top of the Nga Nam jungle, the water has been always fresh. In the past, if we wanted to have fresh water, we had to wait till ebb , then went to Sa Sat, Nàng Mau to get fresh water.

...

Nước ngày xưa ở đây lợ.
The water was sweetish here

[330]

Int: Có sử dụng nước mưa không?
Did you use rain water?

Có nhưng lu hũ ít, không có dồ chứa, không đủ uống!
Yes, but we didn't have enough cans and jars to keep it, so we didn't have enough to drink!

[334]

Int: Nay muốn có nước ngọt làm gì?
Now if you wanna have fresh water, what should you đỏ

Khoan cây nước. Mướn người ta lại khoan.
Digging deep to have waterspout, we hire people to dig.

Int : Nông nghiệp nay trồng lúa + mía
In agriculture, people grow rice and sugarcane

Mía + lúa, hồi trước 90% mía, nhưng giá không cao nên bây giờ không nhiều Bây giờ ban hết rồi
Sugarcane and rice, 90% was sugarcane, but the price was not high, so now we don't grow it anymore.

Int: Trước giải phóng trồng mía ở đây không?
Before 1975, did you grow sugarcane here?
Trước giải phóng có trồng khóm, rồi mía, rồi lúa là gần đây
We grew pineapple, sugarcane, recently is rice.

Interview 10
Mr. Tháo
April 20, 2002
Vị Thủy Commune
Vị Thanh District

[002]

Int: Kinh Xáng này đào năm nào?
When was this canal dug?

2 cái giáp lại 1923 ... Kinh này đào bằng xáng, hai chiếc múc giáp lại Pháp làm. Xáng bự lắm. ... Một tiểu đội làm. ... Lúc đó tui còn nhỏ.

The two were connected in 1923. This canal was dug by dredge, the 2 of them were connected. The Frech did. A small one did it. At that time I was small.

Lúc đó điền dịa ở đây có hương chức, hội tề (của dình, của làng xã, tổng của huyện). Nó phân chức ra như ông cả ông chủ ông thân hương hào ...
There were village officials and administrators... They set the positions themselves...

Int: Trong thời đào kinh dịa phương này có chuyện gì?
What stories did people have at the time of diging the canals?

Cái đó là cái lịnh của nhà nước, nó dem lại nó nhắm ngay nó múc. Nhưng nếu ngay nhà giàu nào thì lo tiền cho nó, nó tránh chỗ đó.

It was the government's order, they located where to dig. But if they planned to dig at your house, you should give them money for them to avoid digging at your house

[032]

Int: Thủy lợi
How about the irrigation?

Đào kinh, lúc kinh nhỏ bắt dân, ví dụ bắt một đầu xâu thuế thân (có một tấm giấy thuế thân), phải đào mấy ngày công, nó cho tiền ăn ... chừng vài cắc bạc (thời Pháp).

Digging canals, when the canals were small, they forced us to dọ To pay for a paper like the ID card, we had to dig several days, they paying a little money for eating, about some cents.

Int : Ông làm ruộng ở đây hồi xưả Đất như thế nào?
Did you work in the field ? How was the land likẻ

Một công được 5...6...7 giạ, 10 giạ là trúng. Mần nhiều công chừng hai ba chục, lúc không tiền thì hỏi, hỏi cả lúa nữa, ăn rồi mần tới mùa cũng hết, cỡ tháng này là hết.

If a cong gave about 5 , 6, or 7 gia, we considered it was a good harvest. If you work on 20 or 30 cong, you may have to borrow rice from the landlords, usually the rice was eaten up before the harvest came, around this month of the year.

Int : Một gia đình một năm ăn bao nhiêu giạ?
How many gia did a family eat a year?

[misanswer]

Tùy, có thể một người có một ngàn, hồi đó tui mần 100 ngòai công.
It depended, a person could have a thousand, I did a hundred cong.

[068]

Int : Một người một năm con bao nhiêu giạ?
How many gia was left for each person after you paid the debt to the landlords?

Không còn giạ nào hết, nó lấy hết. Ví dụ ông là điền chủ, ông cho mượn lúa làm ăn, tới mùa ông lại lấy hết, nếu dư thì chừa lại, thiếu thì không có chừa Rồi tui phải lại nhà ông, ông cho vay 100 công : 60 giạ, trong vòng một năm phát bao nhiêu lần chứ không cho lấy một lần. Lấy một lần 10...20 giạ cho đủ vậy thôị

Nothing. They took all. For example you were the land owner, you lent me rice for me to grow and to eat, when the harvest came, you took all of my rice.If the new harvested rice was more than the rice I owed you, you left some for me; if it wasn't, you took all.

Rồi nó cho lính đi bắt dân, mỗi người phải có giấy, có cái bài (card) 5 năm, mỗi năm đóng một lần, mỗi năm đóng mấy đồng.

Then they had their men to arrest the people who didn't have the ID card. The card valued for 5 years, every year we had to pay several dong.

[082]

Int : Giấy thuê dất?
Was that card the card for renting land?
Giấy thế mạng của mình (giống bây giờ là CMND), thế thân.
No, that was the ID card.

Int : Hồi xưa ông thuê dất, điền chủ mỗi năm vào làm giấy thuê dất?
When you rent the land, the land owners came to make the paper every year?

Không, giấy đó là mình tự làm ,còn điền chủ những người có đất cho mướn, những người không đất thì cố, hóa đất của Pháp rồi cho mình mướn lại! Cũng như nó làm chủ dồn điền vậy
No, we had to do the paper work ourselves, the landlords had land for rent, some peole bought or rent the land from French and had us rent again. Like they were landlords.

Int : Người thuê đất cũng phải đào mương?
The people who rented the land also had to dig canals?

Mình làm trong phạm vi đất mình thuệ
We just did in the area that we rented.

Int : Ông thuê đất ở đâu?
Where did you rent land?

Tui mần đất Tây Đất của ông Dốc Củ Sứ ở Long Mỹ (Rạch Giá). Làng Vị Thủy này hồi đó nhiều lắm (từ Long Mỹ ra tới Nước trong)
I worked on French land. This land was from the manager Cu Su in Long My (Rach Gia). Vi Thuy village was a lot (from Long My to Nuoc Trong)

Lịch sử Vị Thủy ...
History of Vi Thuy

Hồi trước Hương chức, mấy ông bự đặt vùng này là Vị Thủy Bên đây Nước dục, ngòai này Nước trong. Hai nước đầu trong đầu dục, xã này bây giờ tới 4..5 xã.
The villages officials of this region named it Vi Thuy The water this side was not clear, the water outside was clear. 2 waters, one was clear and one was not.

Int: Ý nghĩa Vị Thủy
What does Vi Thuy mean?

Nước Trong + Nước Dục. Hương chức, hội tề, địa chủ ở đây xáp lại nắm chính quyền.
Clear water and not clear water. The village officials, the landlords here got together to run the gorvernment.

[105]

... Mướn đất mỗi năm phải đong lúa cho nó, thiếu thì phải làm công trư, thuê 100 công thì phải trồng lúa hết 100 công, nếu bỏ vẫn phải đong lúa.

Renting land, we had to pay rice to the guys annually If we owed them, we had to pay by laboring. We rented 100 cong, we had to grow rice on all100 cong, if we left some empty, we still had to pay rice.

Int : Nếu đất này là trong vùng đất ông thuê, ông phải tự lo hết (đào mương...) Cái mương giáp với kinh lớn, người thuê đất lo, hay nhà nước lỏ

If this land belonged to the land you rented, you had to take care of it (like digging canal...) The canal connected to the big canal was responsible by the land renter or the government?

Đất phèn quá, mình không có kinh xổ phèn, mình yêu cầu nó xuống dào, địa chủ đào cho mình. Dân làm không đủ ăn, công đâu đi dào
Too much alum in the land, we didn't have canals that helped flow alum, we asked the guys to dig, the landlords dug for us. We worked full time but we didn't have enough to eat, how could we find time to give more labor?

Int : Ở đây có bị lụt không?
Was it floody here?

Lụt cũng có mà ít.
There were floods, but not many

Int : Tên của xã là Vị Thủy, mà không bị lụt?
The village was named Vi Thuy, but no flood?

Cũng có nước ngập, nước dâng, dè lúa ngập, trôi dân chúng. Cũng có vùng nhưng ở bờ xáng thì ít,

nhưng trong đồng có khi ngập trôi nhà, nghèo lắm. Thời này mới có bão nhiều, lụt nhiều, còn hồi trước kia ít lắm, hai ba năm mới có một lần. Như hồi đó năm Thìn mới có lụt.

There sometimes were floods, high water pressed down rice, flowed people away It was not much at several parts like the Xang Canal banks, but in the fields sometimes water flowed the houses away, too poor. Nowadays there are more storms and floods, but in the past, not many, there was just once every 2 or 3 years. Like at that time floods only came in the year of the dragon.

[137]

Int : Thú vật? Ví dụ : cá, cọp.....
How about animals? Like fish, tigers.. .

Hồi đó do săn bắn nên cũng vãn rồi Hồi năm 31 tuổi tới giờ thì tui nhớ nhiều hơn. Mần chát da đầu cho họ ăn hết. Về nhà không có thực vật cho mình bồi bổ dưỡng con người Hút thuốc thì trầm với giấy trà. Uống trà thì gạo rang nấu nước uống. Từ hồi cách mạng nắm chính quyền tới giờ khỏe
People hunted, so they were sparse I can remember better what has happened since I was 31 years old. We worked terribly hard ,then they had all of our products. At home, we also didn't have anything nutritious. We smoked with the paper that people used for wraping tea Our "tea" was the torrefied rice.Since the Revolution ran the government to now, we are much better.

Int : Trong những năm 30 ai cũng đói
Were people hungry in 1930s?

Năm đó đói có người chết. ... Năm nào cũng có đói Cứ qua tiết tháng 10 tới tháng chạp mới có lúa chín.
In those years , people died of hunger. Famine came every year. Because we just had ripe in the tenth to the twelveth month in the year.

Int : Khi đói bắt cá, không?
When people were hungry, did people catch fish?
Săn bắt ăn bậy bạ vậy, chứ phải đi kiếm gạo Ra thành nơi có khách đông mần mướn, có vợ ở nhà dặt lờ giăng câu, trồng rau rẫy, dặt lờ sống.
Sometimes, however, we had to find rice.We went to towns ,that were crowded , to ask to be hired. The wives were at home, fishing, growing vegetables for eating.

[156]

Int : Người Vị Thủy khi đi chợ đi chơi, đi bằng ghe hay xe
How did you go to market? By boats or vehicles?

Hồi đó không có xe, không có xuồng bơi nữa. Sau này khi tui lớn, cỡ năm 1940 sắp lên mới mở mang dân chúng. Nó mới đi cưa cây về xẻ đóng xuồng. Tới 1945, cách mạng nắm chính quyền mới phân công chỉ vẽ cho dân làm ăn.

At that time, there hadn't been no vehicles, no boats. Then when I grew up, about in 1940, our minds were a little widened. Then people cut trees to make boats. Then 1945, Revolution held the government, they instructed us new ways to earn a living.

[167]

Int : Sau kháng chiến đất thay đổi như thế nào?
After Resistance, how did the land changẻ

Gia đình mình 10 người, nếu vùng mình ở đất nhiều, thì cấp cho khoang 20..30 công, có chỗ đất ít thì cấp 10 người 10 công. Dân chúng mần ăn, cách mạng không lấy lúa ruộng, cho mình làm ăn. Chỉ lấy thuế nông nghiệp. Ví dụ làm mấy chục gia thì lấy vài gia thuế thôi, thuế đó đóng để nuôi lính nuôi quân.

If you lived in a place that had a lot of lands, and for example, there were 10 people in your family, you were granted 20 to 30 cong; if not many lands, they gave you 10 cong for 10 people We used the lands, revolution [people] didn't take our field rice, we were free to work with the field. The only thing we had to pay was the agricultural tax. For instance, we just paid several gia for this tax only, and this tax was to help the soldiers.

Int : Sau kháng chiến, khuyến khích khẩn hoang đất dai to hơn?
After the Resistance, people were encouraged to clear more waste land?

Ví dụ như gia dình tui và gia dình chú tự ai làm nấy hưởng, gia dình nào dư ăn thì để mua sắm thêm.

For example, my family and your family, each one had his own business, you ate what you grew, we ate what we grew, if you had more than what you needed, you could use that money to buy more stuffs for your family (The answer didn't fit the question)

[195]

Int: Thời kháng chiến có đào kinh thêm?
In the Resistance time, did people dig more canals?

Cách mạng về, dân chúng họp lại đề nghị làm kinh nào, kinh nào thì làm.
When the Revolution people came with us, we got together and asked the to dig which canal, which canal ... , and they dug for us.
200

Int : Sau năm 30 đất thay đổi như thế nào?
After 1930, how did the land changẻ

Tới '45 thì hơi lộn xộn rồi, mạnh ai làm nấy ăn. Năm '45, cách mạng nắm chính quyền về hội họp phân công lại Gia đình đông hưởng nhiều, ít hưởng ít.
Till '45, it was rather messy already, everyone took care of himself. In '45, Revolution [people] held the government, then rearranged. The crowded families were given more land, the fewer member families were given less.

Năm 47 phân chia, cấp đất cho dân, mỗi người làm chủ miếng đất của mình.
Tới năm quốc gia vô, vùng này nhường lại cho Bảo Hoàng, từ đó tới sau nó [Bảo Hoàng] lại thì ai cũng vẫn làm nấy

In '47, the government divided lands to grant us. Everyone of us possessed our own land. When the American came, this region was given to Bao Hoang, the Bao Hoang came here , we still worked on this land.

220

... Hồi cách mạng tiếp thu, có anh em xuống hướng dẫn, mần một công bây giờ 3 vụ, nêu hai thì có thêm 1 vụ màụ
Then in 1975s, there were people coming to instruct and train us, then we could do more like now 3 rice crops, if we do 2 rice crops, there will be one cereal crop.

Int : Thần Nông bắt đầu khi nào?
When did Than Nong begin?

Từ hồi quốc gia nhưng chỉ làm hai vụ thôị
Since the American time, but we did only 2 crops.
...

[246]

Int : Máy bơm nước?
And about water pumps?

Hồi trước tư nhân mới có, sau này cách mạng nắm chính quyền mới làm trạm bơm nước, dem máy đặt bơm cho dân.

Before , just some rich people had had water pumps, then when the Revolution held the government, they made water pumping stations, they brought machines to pump water for us.

Int : Chim?
About birds?

Ở đây có, nhưng cũng có ở sân. Chiều nó gom lại ... ở đây cò, bên kia Còng cọc. Những dân ở trong vùng vườn cò hưởng. Người ngòai không vô hưởng được (cò dẻ, bán trứng).

There were birds here, but there also were at the yards. They got together in late afternoon. Here stocks, there Cong coc. The people who lived in the places where the stocks settled had rights to "inherit" their products , for examples, they could sell the socks'eggs.. . The people outside the place could not enjoy that.
...

[266]

Int : Giao thông ?
How about transportation?

Đi đâu cũng khó khăn, dồn, bót nhiệu Khổ trong hai mươi mấy năm (50s). Chết dữ lắm!
Travelling everywhere was very difficult because of many gun stations... It was very hard during more than 20 years.. . (in 50s). Died a lot !

Int : Xưa người địa phương không đi xả
In the past, local people didn't travel far, did they

Cố bám mồ mả ông bà ở dậy
Trying to cling to our ancestors' graves here.

Int : Cưới vợ trong xã luôn?
Then got married with people inside the village

Trong ngòai gì, miễn có thỏa thuận là cưới
Regardless in or out, just had an agreement, then got married.

Int : Mỗi người có ghẻ
Did everyone have a small boat?

Mỗi người có ghe xuồng đi đây đi đó. Lúc nghèo thì xuồng, kha khá thì ghe, sau có tiền thì vỏ máy, sau này Honda, Dream.....

Everyone had a boat or something to row in the river. In the poor time, we had xuong(dories), then we got better, we got ghe(junks), then we had money, we bought vo may(motor boat), later we have Honda Dream .. . (motobike)

Int : Không có nước mặn?
Wasn't there salty water?

Hồi trước qua tiết tháng này [tháng 4 dương lịch] nước mặn uống dưới sông không được. Thời cách mạng khai thông kinh, dạp nước mặn đi, tháng nào uống cũng được. Ở đây bây giờ nông thôn, nhưng lối sống cũng dễ, không như hồi trước. Hồi đó ở đây tiết tháng này ... có chiếc ghe xuống sông múc, ghe nước chở đi đối (đi đối nước, không nói bán nước [sell the country])

In the past, at this time of the year (the 3rd month of lunar year) , the river water was too salty to drink. Then the Revolution [people] dredged the canals, pushed salty water away, then we could have drinkable water every month. Now here in the countrysides but life is much easier, unlike in the past. In this month at that time, there was a boat that carried fresh river water , then grought around to sell the fresh water. In Vietnamse we said " exchange water" [to money], or "trade water" , we didn't say "sell water" because this term was homonymous with " sell the country".

Int : Nước ngọt thời đó lấy ở đâu?
Where did you take fresh water?

Ở đây Từ Cầu Nàng Mau sắp lên là nước ngọt. Khúc này (Vị Thủy) qua tiết tháng này mặn, lợ.
Here.From Nàng Mau bridge up was fresh water. This part (Vi thuy) , the water was salty and sweetish in this time of the year.

[305]

Int : Nàng Mau nghĩa là gì?
What does Nàng Mau mean?

Không rành. Hồi tui biết là có tên rồi (Ông Chủ Tịch UBND của Xã) Truyền thuyết người lớn nói lại : vùng này hồi trước rừng rú hoang sơ, có một người phụ nữ Khơme về đây sống, tên Mau,có công khai phá, nên người ta đặt là Nàng Mau

Don't know exactly It was there already in my time. (The Chairman of the Commune)
It was said that this region was jungles, and wild; then there was a Khmer woman named Mau coming to clear the land and setlled here, so this region was called Nang Mau [Translator: In Vietnamese,

Nang means Miss in respectful terms]

[316]

(Ông Thảo:) Nàng đó tên Mạu
(Mr. Thao): That woman was Miss Mạu

Thời đó có một làng Khơ me?
Was there a Khmer village at that time?

Còn, lúc nào cũng có, nó ở chung với mình, nó không đi dâụ Tại nó mê quá không chịu dị Nó bám ở đây đủ ăn đủ mặc, nó không dị

Still there, anytime. The guys live with us, they never go anywhere elsẹ Because they love living here, they never gọ They cling to here, enough food to eat, enough clothes to wear, they never gọ

(Ông Chủ Tịch:) Ở Vị Thủy có ba dân tộc : Việt, Hoa, Khơ me là 1273 hộ chiếm 25%, dòan kết gắn bó sống ở đây hòai không đi dâụ

(The Chairman) There are 3 ethnic groups in Vi Thuy: Viet, Chinese, Khmer, The Khmer has 1273 families, 25% of population here, they conjoin together and live here forever, they never move to anywhere else.

[329]

Int : Ngày xưa người Việt trồng lúa, người khơ me làm gì?
In the past, the Viets grew rice, what did the Khmer đó

(Ông Thảo:) Cũng trồng lúa luôn.
Mr Thao: Also grew rice.

Int : Người Hoa cũng vậỷ
The Chinese also?

Ngày xưa người Hoa ở đây buôn bán thôi, nhưng sau này cưới người Việt mới làm, nhìn thấy có lợi mới làm.
In the past, the Chinese here had just done business, but then they married to the Viets and started to do field work when they saw how benificial the field work was.

Int : Ngày xưa người Khơ me ở riêng với người Việt hay ở chung?
In the past, the Khmer lived together with the Viets or not?

Ở riêng, người Hoa thì ở chung với người Việt, Miên thì ở đặc biệt trong một xóm ... (Ông Chủ Tịch:) là phum, sóc.
No, they didn't. The Chinese lived with the Viets, but the Khmer live particularly in a communẹ. . (The Chairman) called phum, soc. [Cambodian: phum, sóc means village- Translator]

[345]

Int : Chỗ người Khơ me đào kinh tới đó?

Did people dig canals at the places where the Khmer lived?

Cũng như người Việt mình, cũng có địa chủ Khơ mẹ Họ có đất cho mướn vì họ cố công ở, làm, sinh sản tới sau họ giàu Ví dụ như điền của ông Ngô Nhiễu, ông này lai Miên.

Like the Viets, there also were Khmer landlords. They had lands for rent because they had tried to stay here, worked and then they became rich, such as the land of Mr. Ngo Nhieu, this man was a Cambodian Vietnamese

[354]

Int: Địa chủ Khơ me thuê đất cho người Khơ me hay cho ai
The khmer landlords had the Khmer rent their lands or had whom to rent ?
...

Ai cũng được.
Anyone.
...

Int : Ở đây có vết tích cổ không? Vị Thủy thành lập năm nào?
Were there any ancient vestiges here? In what year was Vi Thuy founded?

(Ông Thảo) 1893 lập làng Vị Thủy [(Ông Chủ Tịch:) 1893 xây chùa Khơ me].
(Mr Thao) 1893 founded Vi Thuy [The Chairman] 1893 built the Khmer Pagoda

Ngòai ra còn đi tích đền thần Nguyễn Trung Trực năm 1950 tới giờ.
Besides that, there has been Hero Nguyễn Trung Trực temple since 1950.

Int : Có trồng mía và khóm?
Were people growing sugarcane and pineapple

Lúa và mía nhiều, khóm ít. Miệt này ít khóm. Ngòai Hỏa Tuyến, Hỏa Lựu có nhiều khóm vì đất đó phèn den, khóm chịu, ở đây trồng không bằng.

Mostly rice and sugarcane Not many pineapples. In this region , there weren't many pineapples. Out in Hoa Tuyen , Hoa Luu, there were a lot of pineapples because there was black alum in the land, pineaples like it, here the land can't compare to that land.

[396]

...

Bây giờ ở đây có Trầu, Trầu trồng trong đất vườn, thổ cư Trồng xung quanh nhà, 100, 200m2, thu nhập lớn, dảm bảo cuộc sống ổn.

Now there is betel. Betel is grown in garden soild. It is grown around the house, one hundred or two hundred square meters, it gives big profit and can guarantee our lives.

(Ông Chủ Tịch) Ngòai ra khỏang 30 hộ có nuôi cua dinh (ba ba), thu nhập phấn khởi
(The Chairman) Beside that, there are about thirty families raising trionychid turtles, which gives positive profitts, too

[409]

Hồi trước vùng này là dầm lầy, thường thường đào mương khỏang 3 lớp leng (9 tấc) là có trái dừa nước ở dưới
This region was bogs and marshes before, water coconuts could be found in 90 cm deep down.

[415]

Int : Vùng này có dừa nước nhiều lắm?
Were there a lot of water coconuts in this region?

Nhiều
Lots.

Int : Trái dừa nước ăn như thế nào?
How do we eat a water coconut?

Chẻ làm hai, ruột trắng tươi như trái thốt lốt.
Cut it into two, you could see its flesh, which is as white as palmyra flesh.

Int : Có làm bia chuả
Could we make sour beer out of that?

Chưa, chủ yếu ăn tươi
Not yet, we mostly eat it fresh.

[437]

Có cây cỏ nào đặc biệt?
Were there any special kinds of grass or herbs?

Ở dưới ruộng có cỏ Lác, cỏ Năng. Ở trên bờ xáng cỏ Lá tre, cỏ ống (cây tự nhiên). Cây trồng ăn được là rau ngổ, rau dừa, rau ngổ...
There were Lác, Năng in the field. On the canal edge, there were natural grass like Lá tre (bamboo-leaf -like grass -Translator) and ống (Tube-like grass- Translator). There were some other grass that we could grow and could eat like rau ngổ, rau dừa, rau ngổ.

[441]

Int : Có người nào vừa có ruộng vừa có vườn không?
Was there anyone who had both gardens and fields?

Có, số ít. ... Trong vườn có trồng mía, cây cối, trái cây như cam quýt.
(Chủ Tịch UBND) Đặc sản sậy, bông súng, lá sua dũa chấm mắm.
Yes, some People grow sugarcane, some trees like oranges.
...

Hồi 9 năm tui theo cách mạng với Tư Rau, chỗ nào lại đóng là Tư Rau ăn hết. Tụi tui đi công tác về 4...5 chiều, y ra ruộng bắt con nhái bầu nó kêu "nhen nhen", rồi hái rau dừa Một con nhái bầu một cọng rau dừa, y xỏ lụi cây nướng nhái bầu héo héo ăn với cọng rau dừa Thằng Tư Rau tên Thấy, nó là

lính tuị

In the 9-year time I supported the Revolution and had a friend named "Mr. Vegetables", who loved to eat vegetables. When we finished work at 4 or 5 p.m, he went to the filed and caught some hylas, the hylas cried " nhen nhen", then he took some dừa vegetables [a natural grass vegetable which grows in wet land and in swamps- Translator]. Then he grilled the hylas and eat with dừa vegetables. Mr. Vegetables' real name is Thấy, he was one of my underlings.

[473]

Int: Cây mù u cũng được sử dụng làm dèn đầu phải không?
Was mù u used as an oil lamp?

(Ông Chủ Tịch UBND) Cây mù u, cây bạch dàn. (Ông Thảo) Trái mù u đập ra, xắt mỏng, phơi khô, nhồi ra, vắt dầu, đốt.
(The chair man) Mù u, and Bạch dàn, toọ (Mr. Thảo) We beat Mù u fruit , and cut it into pieces, then exposed them to the sun till it was dry, the crushed them up to get oil, then burn .

[484]

Int: Cây cỏ làm thuốc nam?
How about the grass that was used as herbal medicines?

Nhiều Cỏ nào cũng làm thuốc được. (Ông Chủ Tịch UBND) Cỏ Tam Bức (cọng lớn, ở bờ ruộng), chưng với gan heo tươi, trị bịnh gan. Cỏ Màng Trầu, sen nấu uống, mát gan. Cỏ Cứt heo ăn sống trị họ
A lot. Any kind of grass could be used as medicinẹ (The Chairman) Tam Bức grass (big stalk, living at the field edge) cooked with pig's liver could cure liver diseasẹ Màng Trầu grass that is boiled down could help liver disease, toọ Cứt heo grass cures cough.

(Ông Thảo) Thuốc Nam trị giỏi hơn thuốc Tây Bịnh mà thuốc Tây chạy rồi thì thuốc Nam trị hết. Trị trúng bịnh mới hết.
(Mr. Thao): Southern medicine are better than western medicinẹ Some diseases that can't be cured by western medicine could be cured by southern medicinẹ We should use the right herb with the right diseasẹ

(Ông Chủ Tịch UBND dọc một bài thơ:) The Charman read a poem

"Cây cỏ ngàn xưa trên đất Việt
Nay thành diệu được khắp năm châụ.."
"The herbs that originally came from Viet nation
Have now become magical medicines all over the five continents ..."

Cây gì cũng có thuốc hết, cây gì ăn cũng được.
Any kind of trees here contain medical elements, and are eatablẹ

(Ông Thảo) Cây rau diệu, dứt tay sâu, nhai một miệng, đắp bó, sau một đêm, nó liên lại Nhiều khi bị nhiễm dộc dùng cầm máụ (Ông Chủ Tịch UBND) Có khi bị dứt tay, chỉ cần nhai một đây lục bình, rồi đắp lên.
(Mr. Thao) Rau diệu could be used to treat the cuts and to stop bleeding. (The Chairman) Cuts could be treated by lục bình, toọ

...

[527]

Int : Bị thương dùng thuốc nào?
What can be used for injury?

(Ông Thảo) Hồi trào Pháp tui với ông kia đi mần xậu Đi về không có dồ ăn, bạn tui đào móc chuột, bị rắn hổ cắn, ổng lại lấy leng xắn cụt, cắn rồi xắn bỏ, rồi xé khăn buộc đi ra nhà thương. Ra ngòai đó mấy ông bác sĩ nói không saọ Nhưng nếu rủi nó cắn cổ ông thì sao, ông chặt không? Bác ruột tui ổng cụt ngón tay

(Mr. Thao) In the French time, a friend of my and I came home after work. There were nothing left that we could eat, so my friend dug in the mouse hole to find mice to eat, unfortunately he was bitten by a poisonous snake, he immediately cut his bitten finger, then he tore his scarf to bandage it and went straight to the hospital. The doctors said:
"It's Ok now, no problem, but would you cut your head if the snake bit you on your neck?" . I have an uncle that cut his finger, too.

[567]

Int : Thời kháng chiến, đất vùng này bị bỏ hoang hay canh tác?
In the resistance time, was this land cultivated or abandoned?

Ai cũng cứ việc làm hòai, có giặc thì trốn. Không giặc thì ngóc dậy làm. làm rồi có khi không ăn được phải bỏ chạy.....Thời kỳ chiến chết nhiều
We always worked, when the enemy came we hid ourselves. When they went away, we stood up and worked again. Sometimes we finished our crop already but they came, so we had to run away without harvesting our products.

[579]

Int : Nếu không trồng lúa, người dân phải ăn gì?
What did the people do if they couldn't grow rice?

Phải trồng lúa chứ, không có cách khác. Người không có đất phải làm thuê, làm mướn, làm công lấy số tiền ăn, đi giăng câu, dặt lờ.
We had to grow rice, we had no choice.The people who didn't have land had to work for other people to earn a living, and they also went fishing for food.

[600]

(Ông Chủ Tịch UBND) Hiện nay, David, có chỉ dạo cơ cấu sản xuất, ngoài trồng lúa, có chuyển đổi cơ cấu vật nuôi cây trồng.....giúp vốn, cử cán bộ xuống hướng dẫn kỹ thuật. Dang đào thêm kinh xáng tháo chua, xổ phèn, rửa mặn, tưới, tiêu.....

(The Chairman) Nowadays, David, we have lots of instructions about producing food besides growing rice, we also alternate raising animal and growing fruits, rice... We help the farmers capital, money; we also have the engineers instruct the farmers techniques. We are digging more canals for releasing alum, decreasing salt in the water, watering...

VITA

David Biggs grew up in the Cape Fear Region of North Carolina where he spent many good days exploring swamps, rivers and beaches. He received a Bachelor of Arts in History at the University of North Carolina in 1992 and a Master of Arts in History at the University of Washington in 1998. In between that time, he spent several years traveling and teaching as a volunteer with Volunteers in Asia at universities in Vietnam. In 2004, he earned a Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Washington in History. He is currently an Assistant Professor at the University of California – Riverside in Southeast Asian history and environmental studies.