

My Research on Vietnamese History

In Place of a Summing Up of the Global
Focus on Knowledge Lecture Series

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Interest in Vietnam (in student days)

- Interest in Vietnam during Vietnam War era
- Vietnam as the nexus of issues of world history
- War and peace, colonial rule and national liberation, socialism and capitalism
- During Vietnam War entire world revolved around Vietnam
- If I can understand Vietnam, can I understand the world?
- Many Japanese researchers concentrated on Vietnam War period



Why did I choose Vietnam?

- The University of Tokyo at that time
- Dr. Tatsuro Yamamoto was my professor of East Asian History within the School of Humanities
- Research on premodern Vietnam using historical materials written in Classical Chinese (*kambun*)
- Absence of modern/contemporary Vietnamese history specialists
- Nor any Vietnamese language classes
- Change in sense of values
- Resistance of small country against a world power, advocacy of rights of Blacks, minorities and women
- The Vietnam War era....period of establishment of modern democracy with the perspective of protection for the weak
- SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL!

“History is a dialogue between the present and the past.”

—E.H. Carr

- Interest in Vietnamese history....rooted in “Vietnam War” conditions of that time
- However, most people did not become researchers concerning the Vietnam War
- Evolution of My Interest
- From the Vietnam War ---- era of Vietnam as a French colony----era of Vietnam as an independent kingdom----era under Chinese rule---Bronze Age----to archaeologist

Vietnam as a Different “Other”

- Under banner of “national liberation,” socialist Vietnam ...Vietnam as a carrier of universal values
- Did not view Vietnam as a different “other”
- Shocked by experience in the field
- Foreigner living in Hanoi (Japanese language teacher) employed by Vietnamese government
- During that time there were only 12 “resident Japanese”
- Disparities between lifestyles and conventional socialist models
- Vitality of individuals going their own ways without acquiescing to government control
- Eyes opened to individuality of the Vietnamese . . . started engaging in research on Vietnam as a regional culture
- Vietnam research that captures the “smell” of the Vietnamese soil



Source: :Tranh Đông Hồ

Thinking which transcends time and spatial constraints of “now, here” and “then, there”

- Today, when so easy to travel throughout the world, easy to have experiences “here” and “there”
- Japanese student traveling in China during 1980s...Saw how Chinese did not queue when boarding buses or trains = experience of an “alien culture”?
- Like 1950s Japan....dreadful experiences of riding jam-packed trains home from Ueno Station in Tokyo to Aomori at New Year’s time
- In Japan’s case, a major historical break in lifestyles between era lasting from Azuchi-Momoyama Period until the 1950s and era from the 1960s on
- The importance of knowing time axis for an “alien other”

Difficulties in collecting historical materials

- Even on the spot, difficult to establish contact with Vietnamese/fieldwork impossible
- Information that could be readily obtained was the official line and did not jive with actual conditions
- Making photocopies at libraries impossible/ only hand copying
- Only since 1990s have foreigners had access to primary historical materials on contemporary history
- However, innumerable materials existed
- Was able to delve into major works of contemporary Vietnamese literature
- Old man in used bookstore who was an important information source, significance of book banning
- Formation of historical image with lifestyle sensibility of the Vietnamese people



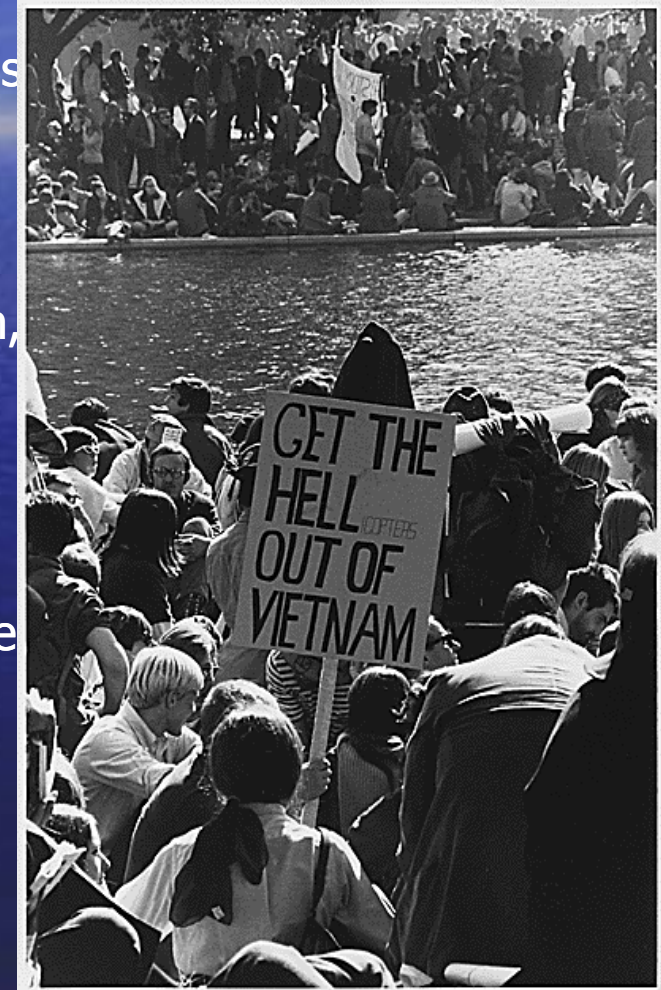
Even prosaic official documents yield important messages if read carefully

- Political report of the 7th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam (June 1991)
- “Based on the principles of peaceful coexistence, despite differences in political and social systems, we will engage in cooperation with all nations on the basis of equality and mutual benefit. While consistently strengthening our solidarity and cooperation with the Soviet Union, we will seek to forge new cooperative relations which are to the benefit of both Vietnam and the Soviet Union and enhance their effectiveness.”

American research on Vietnam during Vietnam War period

Empirical research on the Vietnam region

- A region in which general principles of social sciences and the humanities not very applicable.
- A region of great strategic significance to own national interest
- Classic research on enemy states—research on Japan, research on the Soviet Union, research on Vietnam
- Marked break in American research on Vietnam in 1975
- During latter stages of the Vietnam War, rather high quality research done on Vietnam and many graduate students in the field.
- U.S. Defense Department discontinued subsidies to private research organizations that had been closely involved in military research
- This was a devastating blow to Vietnam research at universities and many graduate students went to Australia and Canada



Source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vietnam_War_Protest_in_DC,_1967.gif

Empty Formalistic Nature of Japan Research on Vietnam

- History constituted mainstream of studies (materials in Classical Chinese)
- Although contemporary Vietnam research entered state of suspension as of 1975, it was not ruptured
- 1998 saw the first Vietnam academic conference involving Vietnam researchers from around the world held in Hanoi,
- 300 participants from foreign countries, including 50 from Japan
- 100 members from the Vietnam Research Association in Japan
- Bolstering of regional cultural research



From Empty Formalism to Practical Application

- Ties of trust established between researchers, paving the way for government-to-government and economic relations
- The 1990 Hoi An International Symposium proved a turning point in the improvement of Japan-Vietnam relations
- Port where a *Nihonmachi* (Japan town) existed during the tally trade era
- A town that retains the look of an old trading port in Southeast Asia
- Movement (supported by Japan) to preserve the look of the town as a UNESCO World Heritage Site
- Japan's aid policies...reflected in research results



Source:

http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/ファイル:Chua_Cau_Japanese_Bridge.jpg
(2010/05/07)

Practical Application of Historical Research

- Belgian historian Henri Pirenne (1862-1935)
- Academic knowledge extensively “appropriated” by combatant nations during World War I...chemistry and history
- Chemistry—explosives and poison gas
- History— provided the basis for uniting the inhabitants of different nations as the foundation for total war and furnished its justification

Great Vietnam Famine of 1945 (1)

- Abnormal weather from autumn of 1944 until spring of 1945
- Peak of famine was January~April 1945
- Scale of tragedy...2 million victims according to Declaration of Independence of Democratic People's Republic of Vietnam
- Then population in North Vietnam—north of Quan Tri Province—more than 13 million

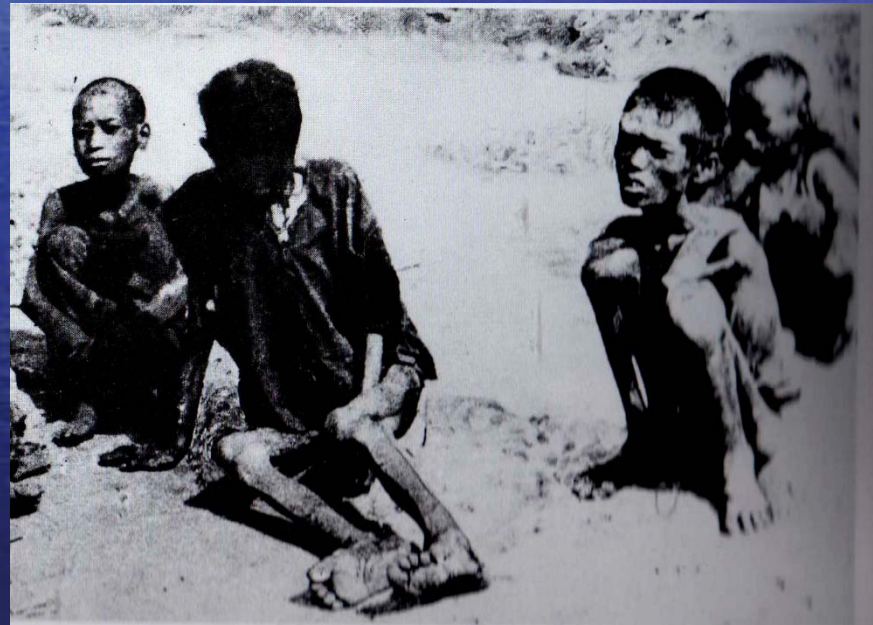


Photo by Võ An Ninh

Great Vietnam Famine of 1945 (2)

Causes of Famine

- Extremely fragile agriculture of northern part of Vietnam (especially in Red River alluvial plain, New Delta, coastal areas)
- Abnormal weather
- System for compulsory purchases of rice (implemented in northern part of country from 1943)
- Reduced grain tillage due to shift to jute and castor-oil plants
- Interdiction of rice supplies from the south
- (due to bombing by U.S. forces)

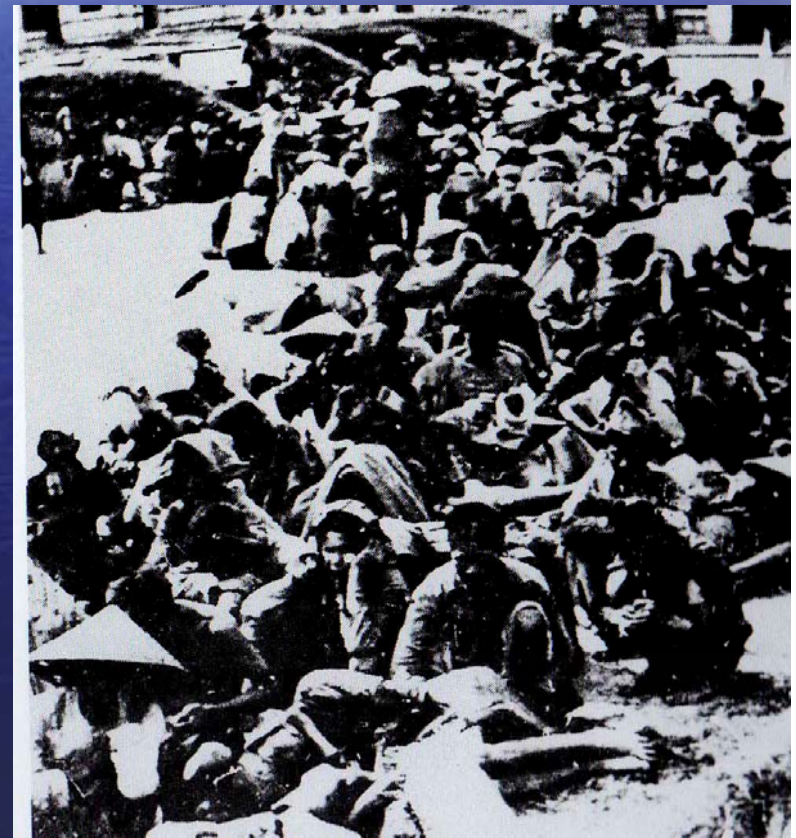


Photo by Võ An Ninh

Great Vietnam Famine of 1945 (3)

- Turbulent political conditions
- No regime uniformly recorded the famine

March 9, 1945 Japanese military abolished French colonial regime in Indochina

August 15 surrender by Japan. September 2 Declaration of Independence of the Democratic People's Republic of Vietnam

Followed by long war. Japan-South Vietnam reparations negotiations

Around one million famine victims in South Vietnam, 300,000 in Japan.

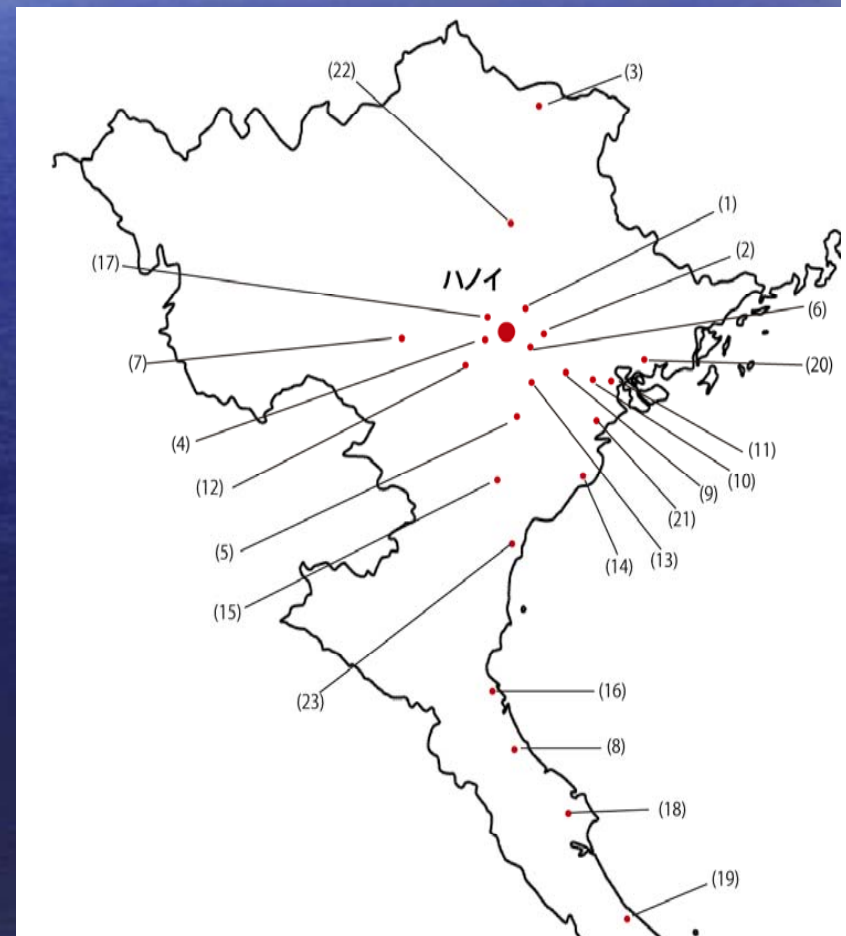
North Vietnam 2 million according to Declaration of Independence



Photo by Võ An Ninh

Japan-Vietnam Joint Survey (1)

- Survey Methodology
- Attempt to recreate actual conditions of the famine so they cannot be denied
- Investigation of issues below the surface...chose one village per province in the regions of northern Vietnam where the famine broke out which was considered representative
- Sought to ascertain the total population, composition of households, economic conditions of households, number of famine deaths per household
- Collected reminiscences of elderly individuals who could recall conditions at that time
- Survey period and results
- From summer of 1992 to spring of 1995....23 villages in the northern part of Vietnam
- August 1995 Betonamu Rekishi Kenkyujo (Vietnam History Research Center) issued *Betonamu no 1945 Nen Kiga: Rekishiteki Shoko* ("The Vietnam Famine of 1945—The Historical Evidence")



The Casualties of the 1945 Famine in 23 Villages in the Northern Part of Vietnam

Village Name (Province Name in 1945)	Total Population of Village (no.)	Famine Deaths (No.)	Mortality Rate (%)
(1) カーリー(バクザン)	1,300	162	12.46
(2) ズオンフック(バクニン)	1,473	372	25.25
(3) ニュオンバン(カオバン)	430	36	8.37
(4) ラケバック(ハドン)	652	177	27.15
(5) ビンチュン(ハナム)	1,398	638	45.64
(6) コビ(バクニン)	2,401	234	9.75
(7) ゾニャンハー(フクイエン)	580	147	25.34
(8) タイックモン(ハティン)	1,943	215	11.07
(9) ニュティン(ハイズオン)	2,403	351	14.61
(10) チライ(ハイフォン)	329	80	24.32
(11) クアンムック(キエンアン)	2,052	1,206	58.77
(12) イエンクアン(ホアビン)	1,104	207	18.75
(13) フォントン(フンイエン)	792	180	22.73
(14) ドンコイ(ナムディン)	1,395	781	55.99
(15) タイイエン(ニンビン)	494	189	38.26
(16) ランチュン(ゲアン)	869	293	33.72
(17) フォンノン(フート)	523	70	13.38
(18) トーグア(クアンビン)	1,391	600	43.13
(19) カムフォ(クアンチ)	1,237	164	13.26
(20) ブイサー(クアンイエン)	524	382	73.9
(21) ルオンフー(タイビン)	1,379	594	43.07
(22) ドンクアン(タイグエン)	339	66	19.47
(23) トゥフー(タインホア)	1,141	217	19.02

Japan-Vietnam Joint Survey (2)

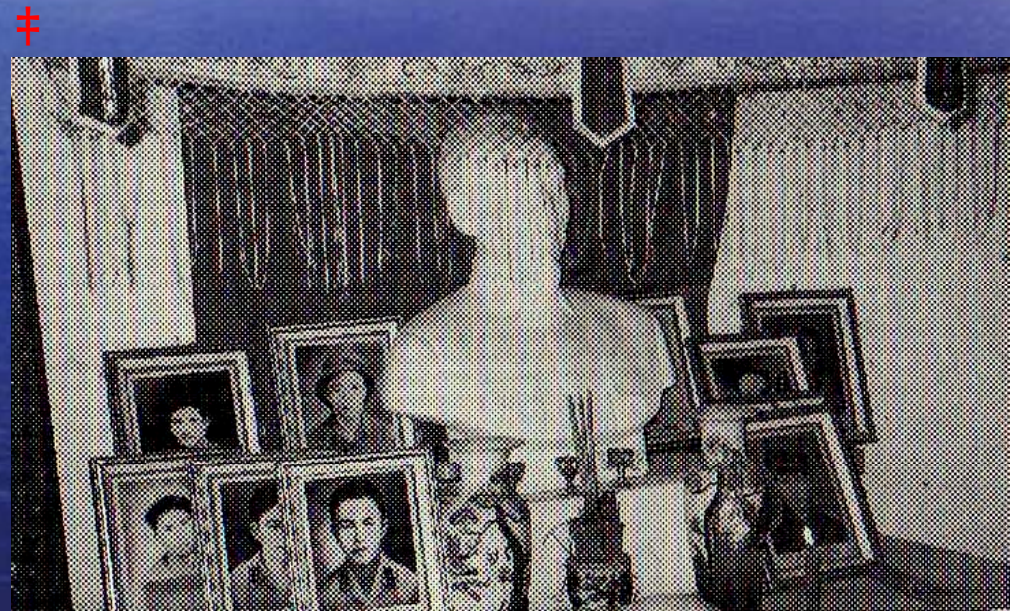
- 1. Broad geographical extent of famine damage
- 2. Severity of famine damage
- 3. Geographical diversity of famine damage
- Reference materials
- Motoo Furuta *Senso no Kioku to Rekishi Kenkyu* ("War Memories and Historical Research"), in *Nashonaruru Hisutorii o Koete* ("Beyond National History"), edited by Yoichi Komori and Tetsuya Takahashi, Tokyo University Press 1998

Considering the Testimony (1)

- Attempting an approach that as much as possible grasps the objective truth
- Testimony by elders (composition of each household in the village, famine deaths), mutual checking
- Dedication to historical materials verification....If we read historical materials with an open mind detached from self-interest, then we can express ourselves in objective historical images
- Position constraints on individuals who created historical materials (witnesses) and the readers of the historical materials (researchers)
- Recorder—historical materials—reader—facts
- Awareness of problems related to the conditions under which witnesses spoke, and what kind of stance the researchers adopted in shaping their testimony

Considering the Testimony (2)

- Are the witnesses repeating the “official story” as the result of political education?....Are they awarding the war victims the status of martyrs, simply repeating the official story of the 1945 Famine?...memories that have to be told...First time they have spoken of these matters outside of family and friends



Source: *Hoo Ojisan o Katsugu* ("Carrying Uncle Ho on the Shoulders") by Yoshinori Sumimura in *Betonamu no Shakai to Bunka* ("Society and Culture of Vietnam") No.2, Fukyosha, 2000, 245pp

Considering the Testimony (3)

- Position of investigators
- As a Japanese researcher, as an individual historical researcher
- peasants vs. researchers + Vietnamese vs. Japanese
- Narrowing the perception gap between Japan and Vietnam
- “Just like the Japanese”... “Especially because you are Japanese”
- Would like to provide materials that are persuasive to many Japanese

Do Objective Historical Facts, etc. Actually Exist?

- Overemphasis on status constraints—Do individual histories, historical facts, etc. actually exist?
- Striving to get as close as possible to objective facts
- If such a standpoint can be shared, dialogue is possible
- *Sekai Rekishi B* (“World History B”) Sanseido
- Large-scale famine deaths in the northern part of Vietnam

Recent Japanese Research on Vietnam

- Diversification of research fields
- Economy, society, culture
- Environment, nature
- This is something to be welcomed
- From an era of discussing “Vietnam” to an era in which we discuss separately Vietnam’s politics, the Vietnamese economy, etc.
- Doubts about research that does not have a Vietnamese viewpoint



Source:

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Áo_dài,_Hồ_Gươm_2.jpg
(2010/05/07)

The Allure of Vietnam—Coexistence of different people and a helter-skelter vitality



Source:

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ho_Chi_Minh_City_street_2.jpg

<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:TPHCM-Motorcycle.JPG>

(2010/05/07)

Doi Moi

– Coexistence of Socialism and Capitalism

- On the political front, strict adherence to the socialist line and one-party rule by the Communist Party
- On the economic front, introduction of market principles, openness to the outside and capitalism
- Same characteristics as China's "Reform and Opening Up"
- Socialism-oriented market economy—To what degree can growing disparities in wealth arising from economic development be rectified?



History of the *Ao Dai*

- Traditionally the waist cloth was the female garment
- Introduced in the 18th century by a king who was enamored with Chinese-style elegance
- Popularized in 19th century
- Refined into a modern fashion in the French colonial period



Source: Vietnam Encyclopedia 1995

Wikipedia commons(2010/05/07)

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mot_so_kieu_ao_dai_le_hoi.JPG

Recent *Ao Dai*



Source:

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mai_Phuong_Thuy_Vietnam_Festival_2008_in_Japan.jpg

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hai_thieu_nũ_mặc_áo_dài.jpg

(2010/05/07)

Cosmopolitan fashion?

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Then there is my research on Ho Chi Minh

