



FIELDWORK IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

President's Column

By Philip Kelly

Department of Geography
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In his final report as President during the recent Quebec City conference, Steve Dery dubbed the CCSEAS the 'Convivial' Council for Southeast Asian Studies. I'm inclined to agree, and indeed such is its convivial warmth, it's all too easy to emerge from the CCSEAS AGM having agreed to take on quite unexpected new jobs! It is thus with surprise but great pleasure that I start my term as President and introduce to you the new executive committee of the CCSEAS. Tineke Hellwig will serve as Vice-President and will lead her colleagues at the University of British Columbia in organizing the next CCSEAS conference in 2009. Danièle Bélanger (University of Western Ontario) will take on the role of Treasurer, while Yann Roche (Université de Québec à Montréal) continues to serve as a member of the Executive (and President of the Canadian Asian Studies Association). Jean-Philippe Leblond (Université de Montréal) continues as a student representative and newsletter editor, and is joined in these roles by Geoff Stewart (University of West-

ern Ontario).

Many thanks to the departing members of the Executive (Steve Dery, Van Nguyen-Marshall, and Keith Barney) for all their work, and especially for bringing us together in the very successful conference at Laval last October.

The hierarchy of associations to which the CCSEAS belongs is a mystery to many members, although in fact it functions much like the notorious human pyramids constructed at our conferences! At the top of the pyramid is the Canadian Council of Areas Studies Learned Societies (CCASLS), headquartered at Concordia in Montreal and funded in recent years by a grant from the International Development Research Center (IDRC). This brings together Asianists, Latin Americanists, Africanists and Middle East specialists. Asianists are represented by the Canadian Asian Studies Association (CASA) and CCSEAS is one of CASA's three constituent parts, along with the South Asia and East Asia Councils. It is worth noting this structure because changes may be afoot. The IDRC grant to CCASLS has been extended by one year and is under review, and it may be that a different configuration of associations

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FROM
THE
EXECUTIVE

IN THIS
EDITION

Field notes on research in Burma (Myanmar)

By Bruce Matthews

Professor Emeritus, Acadia University, Nova Scotia

RESEARCH REPORT

By B. Matthews

I was in Myanmar in December 2007, largely in Rangoon (Yangon), with the express purpose of making first-hand observations of social and economic conditions two months after the so-called 'Saffron Revolution' or September upheaval. My main area of research interest is religion and life in contemporary Theravada societies. I recognized that it would be imprudent for me to visit former contacts associated with Myanmar's Buddhist monastic order. I was able, however, to meet freely with a number of people, such as local business persons, economists and a few academics. Herewith are brief observations from that research trip that may set the scene of what conditions are like in urban Myanmar.

First, household inflation for 2007 in Yangon was 60% (notably the black market is responsible for about half of the local economy). The key cost of living issue of the price of rice, cooking oil and fuel continues to be the crucial indicator of possible future social unrest, though the junta (State Peace and Development Council) seems oblivious to the likelihood of urban society reaching another point of critical mass within the next two or three years. Mid-2007 salary increases for civil and military personnel had to be covered by domestic fuel prices increases. The latter sparked the August-October upheavals.

Second, international sanctions have made a serious impact on urban employment. Attempts to 'target' sanctions have proved ineffective. Garment, tourist and construction industries are affected in particular, with loss of half a million jobs. Ironically, Myanmar does experience the effects of globalization (e.g. border trade, IT) magnifying the weaknesses of the country's political and economic systems. But apart from foreign investment in natural resources, there is no investment whatsoever in Myanmar's economy, however defined. Essentially a 'rent-seeking' economy, the state takes maximum profits from every consumer necessity from hand phones to car licenses. Many items continue to be illegally profitable for the junta and crony business people, notably narcotics, gems and exotic timber.

Third, despite being recently disrobed or locked out of the monasteries, the Buddhist *sangha* continue to be a major agent for change in Myanmar. Most ab-

bots have been forced to sign documents that blame the upheaval on monks, but several older, respected clergy (*sayadaws*) noted for their not-so-veiled criticism of the junta's anti-*sangha* actions (though still "shielding themselves in allegory"), are quietly starting down the regime as best as they can. The *sangha* initially asked lay devotees not to participate in the upheaval and street demonstrations. Seen as putative chief instigators of the upheaval, the Tatmadaw (SitTat or armed forces) and police still regularly invigilate monasteries.

Fourth, the population as a whole (52 million) remains depressed and scared, constantly under the watchful eye of the 13-million USDA (Union Solidarity and Development Association) and collateral *Swan ar shin* ('masters of force'). Society is riddled with informers at every level. (Arguably the only positive thing one might say about the Myanmar government is its elimination of local urban crime and complete intolerance for such forces as Islamic Jihad. Myanmar's internal opposition is not powerful enough to be a mortal threat to the junta.) The National League for Democracy (NLD) leadership and membership is increasingly perceived as 'old' in a country where a generation gap is ever widening. Even the so-called '88 Generation Students' (a reference to the 1988 uprising), a new (2006) protest force independent of the NLD, is now of largely baby-boomer age. The question remains whether the current university-age generation has the same interest in 'democracy' (however defined). Aung San Suu Kyi remains an icon because of the appalling economic conditions rather than as a symbol of democracy. A question frequently asked is whether it was a mistake for Daw Suu Kyi not to participate in the painfully slow Constitutional talks her NLD boycotted. Perhaps the best response is that if she wasn't as stubborn in upholding certain values, she wouldn't have survived this long -despite the fact her boycott means no power at all for the NLD.

Fifth, the junta's remote new NayPyiTaw capital east of Pyinmana in the northern Pegu Yoma hills is an impressive construction for something only two years old, but its vast cost has put huge constraints on the national budget, completely eliminating urgently-needed up-grades in social programs, health and education. A "summer capital" (Yadanabon) is also being constructed near Pin Oo Lwin (Maymyo). The obligatory move of thousands of civil servants to NayPyi-Taw is especially hard on mothers working in the civil service, who must leave their families behind in distant Yangon. The new capital will likely lead to the downgrading and eventual deterioration of Rangoon's city infrastructure (roads, less electricity, etc.).

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By B. Matthews

Sixth, the junta and armed forces (*Tatmadaw*) know that if they don't stick together, they're lost. There is speculation that non-threatening schisms occur within the officer corps, including who will replace Senior General and head of state Than Shwe (at 76 with diabetes, can this be long?), and that in lieu of regime change (unlikely), a 'personality change' would help. When Than Shwe eventually goes, his entourage will also go, and a slow transmutation to some kind of hybrid polity may emerge. Meanwhile, it would appear that the international community is too divided in strategy to help directly reform Myanmar. As long as the junta doesn't cause trouble, keeps the gas flowing and is not a direct US ally, neighbours like the PRC and even India and Thailand do not really care who is in power in Naypyidaw.

In my research, I keep in mind that the metaphor of the 'hermit kingdom' resonates throughout the pages of Myanmar's rich and volatile history. It is a seri-

ous error to overlook this complex background, for it is there that we obtain a glimpse at least of what makes the junta think and act like it does. No one suggests the current junta is comprised of distinguished and honourable leadership, but it is a fact that most, if not all, of the command structure of the military government sincerely believe they are saving the Union of Myanmar from certain disintegration should their highly-centralized polity collapse. In other words, despite the greed and corruption that surrounds any government dominated by a single caste (in this sense a military caste), most of the senior command longingly looks back to historically-unifying figures and identifies with their worldview, dated as it might be. A new generation of junta leaders is not likely to embrace an altered perspective.

(Continued from page 1)

emerges within the next year. The CCSEAS will continue, of course, but the larger structure of which we are a part may change. This is something I will keep members posted about in future newsletters.

Jean-Philippe and Geoff have chosen to focus this newsletter on the issue of fieldwork, with a view to exploring its contemporary forms and, more practically, linking up Canadian researchers who may be in Southeast Asia in the coming year. They have alighted upon an important issue, as it gets to the core of how Southeast Asian Studies, and perhaps Area Studies more generally, are changing. In particular, the questions of where we locate "the field", and who we identify as the "fieldworker", are both ripe for re-examination.

The traditional and romanticized view of "the field" is that it is somewhere 'out there' - a distant, exotic, and decidedly 'other' place, to be captured, categorized and conceptualized by the intellectual apparatus of the fieldworker. But the distancing of 'the field' in this way is increasingly untenable. The places we go to in Southeast Asia are not disconnected from the places to which we return in order to write about them. As a regional construction of colonial and postcolonial geopolitics, one could of course argue that this was always the case in Southeast Asia. But in recent years the porosity of places has intensified beyond recognition. Filipina caregivers look after children in my local park and send remittances

home at the weekend; Indonesian-made garments are on sale at the Eaton Centre; Vietnamese restaurants are spreading through the Spadina Chinatown; the computer I am typing on was assembled in Penang, Malaysia; and, less tangibly, our Canada Pension Plan contributions are being invested in joint projects with the Singapore government's Temasek Holdings. Southeast Asia is very much around me in Toronto, as it is across Canada. We are, as geographer Jennifer Hyndman (2001) argues, 'always in the field'.

While the spatial delimiting of 'the field' traditionally implied it was somewhere distant that we went to and returned from, the notion of 'fieldwork' also implied a *temporal* closure on our direct engagement with our research subjects. While many have returned year after year to their field sites, it was always to re-engage for a finite period and then leave again. This too is increasingly an anachronistic model of research. Information technology has made possible the continuous engagement of researchers with their field sites - staying up to date with current events and being a part of debates and contestations there. Keith Barney at York, for example, has remained an active participant in debates concerning timber plantation development in Laos after returning from two years of PhD fieldwork there.

This brings us to the identity of the *fieldworker*. Another feature of the traditional model of field research is that it assumes an identity for the researcher that is alien to the research site. This is, of course, another anachronism as the dominance of

the white researcher arriving in the region from their university in Canada, the US, the UK, or France has been somewhat (although not entirely) dislodged in the contemporary process of knowledge production. Fieldwork in Southeast Asia may now be conducted by white Canadians based in the region's universities, by locally-born researchers in those same institutions, by Southeast Asian students enrolled in 'Western' universities but returning to conduct fieldwork, and by first or second generation Southeast Asian immigrants in Canada and elsewhere. These various positions in relation to 'the field' mean that it is all the more important for researchers to think about who they are in relation to their field sites and subjects (see Guevara, 2006, for an excellent discussion of being a *balikbayan* researcher in the Philippines).

Finally, it is worth reflecting on who actually *does*

the fieldwork. The conventions of academic publishing dictate that the lead researcher takes intellectual ownership and authorship of written work, but the everyday practice of fieldwork is commonly shared with others. Research assistants are often the silent and invisible stagehands who enumerate surveys, transcribe tapes, translate conversations and even conduct interviews. We might reflect more on the intellectual contributions of such individuals.

Congratulations to Jean-Philippe and Geoff for pulling together this issue of the newsletter to reflect on these and other issues.

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

By P. Kelly

INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

By the editors

New type of contributions about fieldwork

By Jean-Philippe Leblond and Geoff Stewart

For most of our members, carrying out fieldwork in SEA is the key means to access data, both from primary and secondary sources. Fieldwork is - at least from our perspective - not only the most exiting part of the research process, but also a very stressful one. As fieldwork is often subject to important costs and time constraints, it can be hard to recover from an ill-informed research decision. Moreover, the fact that a significant portion of our members are not from the region makes the avoidance of such "inadequate" decisions even more difficult. While this challenge is precisely what makes fieldwork exiting, most researchers - and especially graduate students - would probably prefer to have a greater ability to predict how things will ultimately turn out. To this end, we believe the only solution is to learn by experience.

In this edition, we present a new type of contribution: Reports about fieldwork. The goal is to publish first-hand experiences and analyses of fieldwork research, thus enabling graduate students and other researchers to reflect on their practices and better prepare themselves for this crucial part of the research process. Among other subjects, these texts can discuss general aspects of fieldwork research (see the texts by P. Kelly, P. Oabel and J.S. Barter), overall research strategies (see the contributions of N. Tan and J-F Bissonnette), pragmatic issues (see G. Stewart's text) or ethical dilemmas.

While we are convinced that this type of contribution can prove extremely valuable to graduate students and others, we recognize that there's nothing better than face-to-face discussions with fellow researchers.¹ In order to facilitate such informal discussions, we have included a list of graduate students conducting fieldwork in 2008. It is hoped students (and other researchers) with similar itineraries will contact each other while in the field.

We are looking forward to receiving future contributions about fieldwork to be published in future editions of the *CCSEAS Newsletter*. As always, comments and suggestions about the content of the newsletter are welcomed.

1. Indeed, the idea to include in the newsletter this type of contributions came after one of the editors participated in such face-to-face discussions as part of a methodology class taught by Sarah Turner at McGill University and graduate students group discussions organized by Dominique Caouette (Université de Montréal).

My Fieldwork Experiences in Singapore and Taiwan

by Netina Tan

PhD Candidate in Political Science

University of British Columbia

I am a fourth year PhD Political Science student at the University of British Columbia. I entered candidacy in August 2006 after defending my dissertation prospectus entitled "Party Building, Cohesion And

**EXPERIENCE
IN SINGAPORE
AND TAIWAN**
By Netina Tan

Survival: A Comparative Analysis Of Dominant Party Rule In Singapore (1986-2001) And Taiwan (1976-1996)". As my title suggests, my dissertation seeks to explain why dominant single-party regimes persist over time and I have chosen the People's Action Party (PAP) in Singapore and the Kuomintang Party (KMT) in Taiwan as my comparative case studies. Building on democratization and party-politics literature, my focus is to explain how the organization and institutionalization of recruitment, leadership renewal and party discipline encourage cohesion and prolong its prospects of survival. After my defence, I applied to various research institutions in Singapore and Taiwan in order to have a base to work from for my fieldwork. From January to March 2007, I was accepted as a Visiting Research Associate in the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. To build my primary data on the PAP, I spent most of my time surveying the excellent collection of books and resources at the RSIS library; the SAFTI-Military Institute library; Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Library and the new Singapore National Library. Besides reading and frantically photocopying at the libraries, I also conducted fifteen in-depth interviews with academics and party members from the ruling and opposition parties. During this time, I learnt that setting up interviews in Singapore could be a long drawn process. Some members of parliament (MPs) turned down my requests out of skepticism, while others took time to seek approval from their party's public relations department before speaking to me. This experience made me realize that I should have been more proactive, invested more time to network and get informal introductions in advance before sending request letters to my targeted interviewees. For example, I could have created opportunities to meet the MPs during their monthly "walkabouts" and "meet the people" at their respective constituencies and introduce myself before sending out the formal request

letters.

In April 2007, the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (TFD) awarded me with a dissertation fellowship to support nine-months of fieldwork in Taiwan. Learning from my fieldwork experience in Singapore, I was more pro-active and creative in making contacts with my targeted list of Taiwanese interviewees. As a result, I was able to secure over thirty in-depth interviews with legislators, KMT cadre members and academics, who provided me great insights on the dynamics of the KMT's intra-party politics. I was in Taiwan at an exciting time when many research institutions and political parties were campaigning and discussing hot issues in the lead-up to the legislative and presidential elections in January and March 2008. Participating in the rallies and conferences offered me ample opportunities to meet and network with political elites and supporters from the various parties. Aside from networking, I also spent most my time collecting printed materials, public opinion data and archival documents at the KMT Archives library at the KMT Headquarters, Academia Historica, the Taipei National Library, the East Asia Barometer Research Centre at National Taiwan University and the Election Study Center at National Chengchi University. As I was able to speak Mandarin and Hokkien (Taiwanese) I did not encounter much language difficulty during my interviews. However, as I only know "Hanyu Pinyin" and simplified Chinese characters, searching materials in complicated traditional Chinese characters and "Wubi" computer input method took some time getting used to. In December 2007, I completed my fellowship and presented my initial research findings on the KMT at the TFD. My overall fieldwork goal is to interview at least sixty high-echelon political elites and academics for both my cases. Hence, my plan this year (besides trying to write four chapters for my dissertation!) is to spend another two months in Taiwan and Singapore to fill any remaining gaps in my data collection. Wish me luck!

To Live the Unknown

By Jean-François Bissonnette

PhD student in Geography

University of Toronto

Venturing into Southeast Asia with the intent of carrying out a research project without prior experience of the field requires a certain amount of recklessness. After one year of coursework in the Master's programme of Geography at the Université de

Montréal, I began my "data acquisition" in Sarawak in May of 2006. I can hardly express the feeling of excitement and wonder that filled me as I was truly experiencing the reality of this state of East Malaysia where I had planned on staying for four months. I had tried in vain to apprehend the complexity of this universe through the literature, but this could not prepare me for the smiles, words and new friendships I would establish, or, more ominously, the difficulties I would encounter trying to conduct research there.

LIVING THE UNKNOWN

by J.F. Bissonnette

It is not that my professors had neglected to inform me of these potential obstacles, but rather, due to my naiveté, I ignored the width of the gap lying between me and the reality of Sarawak. Therefore I could not be sure of what I could practically achieve in Malaysia. From the outset, the issues I had wanted to deal with were deemed too controversial by the first key informants I met; and, more importantly, my research permit might not be granted. After this initial shock I realized I would have to manoeuvre carefully to achieve my objectives. My research, which I first thought might be compromised, would simply have to be broadened. As I planned on dealing with rural exodus and local agricultural systems, circumstances compelled me to grapple with social, political, judicial and identity aspects of native land rights. The Malay language, which I had studied prior to the fieldwork turned out to be the most useful tool in this endeavour, more qualitative and cultural than I had expected.

Needless to say, other pitfalls would punctuate my research activities, but the richness and intensity of my experience would never cease to increase over

the months as I would receive help from extremely generous people. I would also have to deal with the over-consumption of rice wine offered by my Iban hosts, disease, the anguish of living in jungles (both natural and urban), as well as with funeral rituals and realms of ancestors. Of course, these "pitfalls" were in reality invaluable learning experiences which are still informing my conception of the world. Thus, being armed with cultural relativism, passion, sensibility, the love of words and languages did, in the end, allow me to fully benefit from such an experience. I shall also add the fundamental importance of having a reliable contact network—for example at the university and with NGOs—as indispensable for my success. What is more, it is often relevant, if not always imperative, to share our analysis with local actors and stakeholders. I mainly retain that fieldwork and the reflections it instigates, neither start nor end in a material place, but rather accompany us throughout our lives.

'Why' Carts Before 'What' Horses In Prospectus Writing

By Shane Joshua Barter

PhD candidate in Political Science,
University of British Columbia

My dissertation, "Peace by Piece: Village Mediation of Intrastate Conflicts" explores how traditional village dispute resolution systems adapt to help overcome separatist conflicts in Southeast Asia, and how these micro-level systems can percolate to influence a conflict as a whole. When I was preparing my prospectus, I was encouraged by colleagues and committee members to consider 'why' questions. The problem was, without completing fieldwork, I was not entirely sure of the 'what'. A great deal of political science research begins with established relationships and works backwards. But for studies which are fieldwork intensive, there is an element of open-ended induction. Fieldwork is most valuable when there is insufficient information on a particular phenomenon—it is about gathering data.

Before I could ask why local leaders do what they do to overcome violent conflicts, I first had to discover *what* they do, as few scholars have studied major conflicts at the village level. It was suggested that I ask "why do village religious leaders take on healing

roles?" But beyond some anthropological studies of dispute resolution, I was not sure that village leaders actually took on healing roles at all. This was only my assumption, and should be established before it is explained. Many NGO reports claim the opposite, that village religious leaders can be aggressive actors who disregard human security. After a year of field research, I found that in Aceh, community Islamic teachers (Ulama) played inconsistent roles during the conflict. I found that generally, Ulama were loyal to the state in areas controlled by Indonesia, part of the rebel shadow state in areas controlled by the Free Aceh Movement, and played clear healing roles only in contested areas. Ulama in all three regions played *some* healing roles, namely for demobilized soldiers, but only in contested areas did Ulama carry out the functions that a 'why' question alone would have assumed. If there is variation by political context, it is unlikely that the roles of religious leaders are culturally defined (unlike village chiefs). Instead, there is an element of pragmatism and realism in the actions of Acehnese Ulama. As I prepare to research my other cases, now I know to look for variation according to political context.

A question that asks 'why' presumes that the 'what' is known. For field-intensive studies, the PhD prospectus process can put the cart before the horse. A student cannot begin fieldwork until after their pro-

PUTTING THE CART BEFORE THE HORSE ?

By Shane
Joshua Barter

spectus defence, so they are often expected to frame 'why' events happen before they know 'what' they are explaining. The solution that my committee members and I decided on was to complete a good draft Prospectus, do some initial fieldwork, and return to complete a final draft. This is what I recommend for new PhD students to try. I went to Aceh with a basic research plan, learned some interesting

things, and revised my questions before I begin fieldwork in Thailand and the Philippines. This has helped make the prospectus process to be much more useful in guiding what I hope will be a really, really good dissertation.

Reflections on *Corporeality* In Field Research

By Patrick Oabel

PhD Candidate in Geography

University of British Columbia

Before embarking on fieldwork for my graduate studies several years ago, the idea of "locating your own body" appeared to me as something abstract and confusing yet profoundly important when doing research. In the daily practice of fieldwork, *corporeality* involves aspects of your own identity, and those of the people you are researching, typically along the lines of gender, age, race, class, status and citizenship. These different parts of embodied social identity become more noticeable between the researcher and the people researched in various scenarios; often having the effect of both enabling and disabling certain research possibilities. In this article, I shall draw on two "research encounters" that stress the importance of self presentation and flexibility in the practice of fieldwork based upon experiences in a Philippine community in 2007.

The first research encounter deals with the effects of self presentation on interview recruitment. As an ethnographer, the most subtle of changes to the physical appearance greatly shapes the impressions of potential informants and interviewees. Some embodied characteristics are more difficult to mask than others such as skin color or race. As a Canadian-Filipino, I was partially able to underplay my class and status positions through my appearance. In practice, this meant dressing for the occasion and respecting those being studied. In this way, to venture out into the haciendas, my colleague Mario and I would "dress down." In addition to his regular clothing, Mario, who has worked as a *karga-tapas* (sugarcane cutter and loader), wore his long sleeve shirt and ball cap and I wore something similar. This had the effect of making the people that Mario knew more comfortable when I approached them. However, one thing I could not always hide were my eyeglasses. Whether attending parties or gatherings, I was greeted with "Hello padre, hello father," as I

was often mistaken for a local priest since most families cannot afford to buy eyeglasses. While people accepted me at such gatherings, other groups I wanted to interview like *standbys* - unemployed men passing their time on the streets - mysteriously disappeared when I first came around, perhaps because I was new to the area or they were afraid that I would ask them to do work at the local church.

The second research encounter deals with the effects of self presentation on interview dynamics and the openness of gatekeepers—individuals who could provide me access to a community. By disclosing my Canadian background during household interviews I conducted I often became the interviewee. These meetings were partly made up of responses to my open-ended questions, and partly consultation sessions on migration to North America. Young people were especially keen to speak with me, mainly to practice their English and ask me about foreign jobs. In another instance, my Canadian background worked against me as I tried to recruit one key Gatekeeper - through an initial referral named Barso. Barso mentioned to the Gatekeeper, "You'd like him, he's Canadian." The Gatekeeper responded, "I don't want to deal with him. I'm busy." I accepted this decision and continued with my research. A couple of months later, having exhausted my list of contacts, I chanced upon a face-to-face meeting with this Gatekeeper. "You're the Canadian?" the Gatekeeper asked. I nodded in response. Surprised and smiling, the Gatekeeper replied, "I didn't want to talk with you because I thought you were a missionary. I didn't know you're a Filipino ..."

In sum, dimensions of *corporeality* are often taken for granted in the practice of Southeast Asian studies research. In my case, my own research positions worked to both my advantage and disadvantage, but were nonetheless crucial for the development and evolution of my research project. I felt that the "Gatekeeper's" eventual willingness to help me after our face-to-face meeting on the street was a watershed moment during data collection and probably saved an academic term's worth of energy, worry and stress. Having lost sight of what to expect both prior to and in the midst of conducting research in a

different cultural context, perhaps these cases will serve to remind other student researchers to take heed of Susan Hanson (2004) and her belief in being more open to the research process and finding the unexpected, and hopefully more enlightening, avenues of inquiry along the way.

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Conducting Archival Research in Hồ Chí Minh City: Some Personal Observations

By **Geoffrey C. Stewart**

PhD Candidate in History

University of Western Ontario

Over the past decade and a half the Vietnamese government has gradually been opening up its archival collections on the period of the American War to foreign researchers. Recently, it began reorganizing and cataloguing the holdings of Trung Tâm Lưu Trữ Quốc Gia II (National Archives Center Number 2)¹ in Hồ Chí Minh City (HCMC). In January 2007 I took advantage of this opportunity to conduct research on American and South Vietnamese conceptions of modernization through Civic Action during the First Republic (1955-1963). The following are some personal observations from this research trip.

While Archives 2 is very accessible to researchers there are still a number of bureaucratic matters which need to be dealt with ahead of time. For one thing, researchers require a sponsor in Vietnam in order to get a research visa as well as a letter of introduction which identifies your topic for the Archives.² Consequently, your sponsor will need a research proposal in advance in order to begin processing your visa. There are numerous research institutes and universities in HCMC which may be of assistance. I used the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University - HCMC, and they were extremely helpful.

Obtaining my reader card was perhaps the lengthiest part of the process of gaining access to the Archives. This requires, in addition to the letter of introduction, two passport-size photographs and 15,000 Đồng³ and takes roughly two weeks to process before you can use the collections. In my case I had to wait three weeks to receive my letter of introduction from the university, plus an additional two weeks for the Archives to process my reader card.

The Archives are well organized, but like any bureaucratic institution, they possess a number of idiosyncrasies which require patience and organization in order to use them most efficiently. The Archives are only open Monday to Thursday 8:00am to 11:30am and 1:30am to 4:00pm and on Friday from 8:00am to 11:30am, and it takes at least five days to process a request for documents. The request must be approved by the State Records and Archives Department in Hà Nội and it may refuse permission to view certain requested documents in the event they feel these materials are not pertinent to your research topic. In order to maximize my productivity I spent the first few weeks in the Archives Reading Room poring over the eleven volume finding aid for the Office of the First Republic in order to determine what documents were available and then prioritized the relevant ones in order of importance to my research topic in advance of my first request.

While it is still early, I am quite optimistic my research will provide new revelations about the First Republic of Vietnam and its efforts to establish a viable, modern Southeast Asian nation in South Vietnam; thereby contributing to the ongoing re-evaluation of the Republic of Vietnam based on Vietnamese sources.

1. Additional details regarding Archives Number 2 and its collections may be found in Matthew Masur and Edward Miller's extremely useful article "Saigon Revisited: Researching South Vietnam's Republican Era (1954-1975) at Archives and Libraries in Ho Chi Minh City" which can be accessed at: http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/docs/Saigon-Masur_Miller.pdf

2. This policy may be changing as I know of one researcher who gained access to the Archives with a letter of introduction from his university in the United States.

3. The exchange rate at the time was roughly \$1CDN for 13,600 Vietnamese Đồng.

ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

By **G. Stewart**

GRADUATE STUDENTS DOING FIELDWORK IN 2008

Student &	Time and Location	Research Title or Subject	Supervisor
<i>McGill University</i>			
Lindsay Anderson Geography (MA)	Hanoi & Sa Pa Ho Chi Minh City, Luang Prabang & Thailand	Late April— Late July Late July— August	Study of Hmong textile commodity chains between Lao Cai province and Hanoi Sarah Turner
<i>Université Laval</i>			
Lucie Dubé Geography (MA)	Luang Namtha, Lao PDR	Jan 5th— March 19th (completed)	Study of the relocation of Montagnard populations practicing shifting cultivation following the establishment of Nam Ha S. Déry
<i>Université de Montréal</i>			
Louis Tanguay Geography (MA)	Ho Chi Minh City	May—June	Impacts of the adoption of integrated agriculture-aquaculture systems in the Mekong Delta R. De Koninck
Julie Drolet Geography (MA)	Singapore	May—July	Water Management in Singapore R. De Koninck
Denis Côté Political Science (MA)	Philippines	May— August	Successful Peasant Strategies for the Implementation of Land Reform in the Philippines D. Caouette
<i>University of British Columbia</i>			
Shane Joshua Barter Political Science (PhD)	Southern Thailand South of the Philippines Aceh	May June—July September	Explores how traditional village dispute resolution systems adapt to help overcome separatist conflicts in Southeast Asia D. Mauzy
<i>University of Toronto</i>			
Jean-François Bissonnette Geography (PhD)	Kalimantan, Indonesia	May 15th— August 5th	Cultural identities, entitlements to land and livelihood strategies in Kalimantan (preliminary fieldwork) R. Silvey
<i>York University</i>			
Nga Dao Geography (PhD)	Northern Vietnam	Mid-April— June	Water Governance and Agrarian Change in Northern Upland Vietnam (preliminary fieldwork) R. Roth & P. Vandergeest
Adam Lukasiwicz Geography (PhD)	Lucban, Quezon Province, Philippines	June 2008- March 2009	Qualitative research on the impacts of migration and remittances on rural households involved in agricultural production P. Kelly

**GRADUATE
STUDENTS
DOING
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IN 2008**



The researcher *in the field*
By Olivier Durand, Chainat, 2007



**The other subject of curiosity:
The fieldworker (and the family)**
by Geoff Stewart, Luang Prabang, 2007

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