

DUC HOA VILLAGERS' OPINIONS ABOUT THE U.S., AMERICANS, AND VIETNAMESE AFFAIRS, 1992: A STUDY OF THEN AND NOW

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ABSTRACT

In 1992, a short questionnaire was distributed to all adult residents of Duc Hoa village—located 50 miles west of Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon)—in rural Vietnam. Several opinion questions were replicated from rural surveys conducted by the U.S. during the Vietnam war years (1968-1972). Completed surveys were obtained from 238 villagers 12 years of age or older.

Villagers' opinions in 1992 are described and examined for logical consistency among the various opinions. Findings indicate little anti-American sentiment among these rural villagers and a high rate of consistency among their various opinions. A comparison between Duc Hoa villagers' current opinions and those of the rural South Vietnamese during the war years reveal similar favorable views of the U.S. and Americans at both points in time. However, post-war Duc Hoa villagers exhibit greater dissatisfaction with their personal lives and with the Vietnam government than was indicated by rural people during the war era.

INTRODUCTION

In Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon, South Vietnam) is found the "Museum of American Atrocities" dedicated at its inception to vilifying the U.S. for alleged military crimes against the Vietnamese people during the Vietnam War era. The museum was established by the post-war government in an attempt to galvanize negative opinions and attitudes of the former South Vietnamese people toward the U.S. and Americans. However, in 1995, the museum name was changed to the "War Museum" in what may be a reflection of efforts by the communist government to "normalize" relations between Vietnam and the U.S.

An adversarial relationship has existed between the U.S. and Vietnam governments since the communists assumed control of South Vietnam in 1975.

Initially, the two governments barred their citizens from social and economic contact. This state of avoidance continued for almost 20 years. As a result, there is much confusion about how people in the former South Vietnam feel toward the U.S. and Americans. This study of Duc Hoa village is an attempt to examine opinions of people in the rural countryside. Duc Hoa was chosen for study because it was a rural area that experienced the American presence first hand and was deeply immersed in the wartime military effort of the South Vietnamese against the Vietcong.¹

The course of American military involvement in South Vietnam began on March 8, 1965 when a U.S. Marine Corps Battalion Landing Team went ashore on the beaches north of Danang. Later the same day, a companion battalion landed by air (Lewey, 1978). This marked the beginning of an 8-year period of direct U.S. involvement in the political, economic, and social affairs of South Vietnam.

Over the next few years, thousands of U.S. soldiers were stationed in Vietnam. Many were assigned to military posts located in or near rural villages throughout the countryside. At the peak of U.S. involvement, there were a half million American soldiers in Vietnam. Such a large military buildup along with a sizable number of U.S. civilian personnel produced a high level of contact between the rural Vietnamese and Americans in many rural villages. Most contacts were friendly and helpful, but some were hostile and resulted in hatred and bitterness toward the Americans as attested to by a few military incidents depicted at the Ho Chi Minh "War Museum" (Maclear, 1981).

To minimize anti-American reaction to U.S. involvement in the war, the U.S. military initiated a "pacification" program in 1965 designed to win the friendship and support of the South Vietnamese people, both rural and urban. U.S. advisors were assigned to many rural villages (including Duc Hoa) to help secure the villages and to assist villagers develop local defenses against the communist insurgents. Millions of USAID dollars were spent to assist local businesses and to improve agriculture. During this period the U.S. government conducted a number of public opinion polls across Vietnam in an effort to monitor the perceptions urban and rural people held of the U.S. and its involvement in South Vietnamese life and politics. Two of these polls, the PAAS and JUSPAO surveys (discussed later), gave special attention to the rural population.

In spite of the "pacification program," the war continued to escalate and eventually became unbearable for both sides. Finally, in 1973 an agreement was struck in Paris that allowed the U.S. to withdraw its forces. In return North Vietnam, i.e. Hanoi, agreed to respect the political integrity of the South Vietnam regime. The U.S. quickly removed its combat forces and the groundwork was laid for the eventual conquest of South Vietnam by North Vietnam. North Vietnam invaded South Vietnam in 1975. The U.S. did not come to the aid of its ally. The last day for South Vietnam as an independent country came on April 30, 1975.

DUC HOA—THEN AND NOW

Duc Hoa was a small village in 1967–68 and remained so in 1992. Villagers spent much of their time and effort providing food and services for the 400 South Vietnamese infantry and dozen or so U.S. advisors stationed there. As part of the effort to maintain the support of the rural Vietnamese for the war and the U.S. presence, the U.S. invested considerable USAID money in Duc Hoa and the surrounding rural area. The goals were to develop the local social and economic infrastructure and to improve food production, ie. the rice crop. By far, the most popular infrastructure projects in Duc Hoa were the construction of a village school and the provision of grants for local businesses (Nighswonger, 1966). Through USAID workers and U.S. military advisors, most of the local villagers had some kind of contact with Americans. Usually these contacts were beneficial and amicable.

The people of Duc Hoa were mainly peasants. They worked in the rice fields under the protection of the South Vietnamese soldiers and their U.S. advisors. Several village entrepreneurs supplied the various needs of the soldiers. Examples included sidewalk cafes, laundries, and the village marketplace.

Following the end of the war in 1975, things changed dramatically. Much private property was confiscated and divided into communal plots to be farmed by small groups of villagers. Also, the communist government spent considerable effort throughout the rural countryside, attempting to discredit the U.S. government and Americans (Long, Nguyen, 1981). One of the first informal interviews done in Duc Hoa in 1992 was with several former South Vietnamese soldiers. They told about the concerted effort to change the beliefs and opinions of the villagers. Duc Hoa residents who had worked for the former South Vietnam regime and former soldiers were sent to re-education camps, where they were held until they acceded to the virtues of the communist system and to the errors of their previous behaviors. The rest of the Duc Hoa villagers were required to attend reorientation classes that explained and promoted the communist philosophy.

During the late 1980's, as communism began to collapse around the world, the Vietnamese government introduced a number of capitalistic policies designed to encourage the privatization of agriculture. The purpose was to stimulate the economy and encourage private initiative in food production. Since that time there has been an acceleration of contact with the west, resulting in considerable social change for rural people (Seldon, 1995, p. 139). Capitalism has virtually replaced communism as the dominant economic system. In Duc Hoa, peanut production for export has replaced rice for domestic consumption as the principle crop. Today a privately owned peanut processing plant provides employment for many residents.

During the 1980's, the government initiated a concentrated attack on illiteracy throughout the countryside using both government efforts and private programs (Fishal, 1991, p. 90). As a result, education for rural youth was advocated and rural illiteracy was greatly reduced. Today Duc Hoa's children attend school wearing the traditional white shirt and red scarf uniform of the communist school

system. Ironically, the children go to school in buildings built by the U.S. military in the late 1960's.

WARTIME OPINIONS DESCRIBING ATTITUDES TOWARD THE U.S. AND AMERICANS

During the war years opinions held by a majority of the South Vietnamese people toward the U.S. and Americans were positive, on the whole. However, the Vietnamese tend to be suspicious of foreigners by virtue of their cultural heritage and their long history of dominance by foreign powers. It would not be surprising for some or even many South Vietnamese to hold the U.S. responsible for making their country a pawn in the conflict between East and West. A corollary to such a suspicious view of foreigners is seen in the persistent desire among the South Vietnamese to be free from all foreign social, political, economic, and ideological influences. This includes especially, freedom from China and the former Soviet Union (Smith, Harvey, Bunge, Fredericks, Bernier, and Donald, 1966).

Throughout the 8-year period of American presence, Communist propaganda from Hanoi in North Vietnam and from the Communist controlled National Liberation Front (NFL) or Vietcong in South Vietnam relentlessly attacked the United States for its "imperialist" or "neocolonial" intervention.

During the early years of U.S. involvement in South Vietnam, trust in the U.S. and friendliness toward Americans appeared to increase steadily among the South Vietnamese people. They came to accept the idea that the U.S. entertained no colonial designs on their country. Also, a growing awareness of the communist threat to their independence took hold as the people came to believe that communist China directed the Vietcong insurgency through the Hanoi regime. These two facts played a major role in shaping a favorable public opinion toward the U.S. (Smith, et al., 1966). This was documented to a degree by the PAAS and JUSPAO opinion polls of that time.

METHODOLOGY

During the American presence and military involvement in South Vietnam, two major public opinion polls were conducted involving rural people. The first polling effort consisted of several surveys made by the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO) during the period October through December 1965. The second and most extensive polling effort was a series of surveys identified as the PACIFICATION ATTITUDE ANALYSIS SYSTEM (PAAS). This was a monthly survey beginning during the fourth quarter of 1969 and extending into 1972. A special effort to survey rural villagers as a subpopulation was a key part of the 1971

PAAS effort. Both the 1965 JUSPAO and the 1971 PAAS polls provided data germane to this study.

Preparation of the 1992 Duc Hoa village survey involved a review of the questions and findings from the wartime opinion polls. Two relevant questions from the JUSPAO poll and five questions from the 1971 PAAS rural poll were included in the 1992 Duc Hoa village questionnaire, along with several demographic questions to determine respondent characteristics. All questions were translated into Vietnamese for the 1992 village survey.

A local resident of the village with whom the principal author had maintained contact over the intervening 24 years served as intermediary with the village leaders and assisted in obtaining permission from the village council to conduct the survey. With council approval the questionnaire was distributed to all adults 12 years of age and older in every Duc Hoa household. Of the village's approximately 600 residents, about 400 were old enough to participate. Of these a total of 238 voluntarily completed the questionnaire. The author, in the company of the local intermediary, who served as interpreter, visited every home distributing questionnaires. Many respondents completed the questionnaire during this visit. Those who were not home or wanted more time were asked to bring the completed questionnaire to the house of the intermediary. The sample consisted primarily of males (59%). Half the survey participants (51%) were between 30 and 50 years of age with 32 percent younger than 30 and 25 percent 50 or older (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
Gender and Age of the Duc Hoa Village Sample, 1992

Age	Gender		Total (328)
	Male (141)	Female (97)	
	-----Percent-----		
12-19 years	20.6	31.9	25.2
30-49 years	54.6	45.4	50.8
50+ years	24.8	22.7	24.0

The opinions of Duc Hoa villagers were measured by their reactions to the following questions: (see Table 2 for the response categories)

1. Is there anti-American feeling in your community?
2. Was the presence of the Americans beneficial to the people of South Vietnam?
3. Whether or not you think Americans have helped South Vietnam, do you like them personally?

4. How do you think the American character harmonizes with the Vietnamese character?
5. On which side does most of the hostility lie?

Analysis focuses on villagers' responses to these five opinions. Interest is in who—men or women and young or old—hold what opinions of the U.S. and Americans. Also, attention is given to how the opinions of Duc Hoa villagers compare to wartime opinions of the rural South Vietnamese.

FINDINGS

Within the Duc Hoa sample only 11 percent of villagers believed there was widespread anti-American feeling among the villagers; but another 44 percent believed that a few villagers did harbor such anti-American feelings (Table 2). Women were somewhat more likely than men to perceive anti-American sentiment in the village, as were young persons under 30 years of age. The second question asked villagers to reflect on the war era. About 30 percent of villagers indicated they believed the presence of the U.S. in South Vietnam had been of "great" benefit with an additional 44 percent saying of "some benefit." Only 27 percent perceived little or no benefit. Again women were slightly more likely to hold a negative perception than men, and adults younger than 30 years of age were more negative than older adults. Villagers 50 years of age or older were most likely to perceive "great" benefit from the American presence (37%) and least likely to perceive little or no benefit (19%). Some 79 percent of villagers indicated they liked Americans, with little difference between men and women. Also, young villagers were *least* favorable (70%) and those over 50 years of age were *most* favorable toward Americans (86%).

Two questions dealing with political relations between the U.S. and the current Vietnamese (communist) government provide a somewhat different perspective. Stated in terms of harmony perceived between the character of the two countries, the perception was largely one of harmony. Only about 12 percent perceived disharmony, while the majority (55%) believed there was good harmony between the two countries. A follow-up question about who was to blame for any hostility between the two countries revealed that a large portion (42%) of villagers believed the U.S. was the primary cause. Another 48 percent blamed both countries. Only a few (less than 10%) believed the Vietnamese government was most to blame.

TABLE 2
1992 Opinions of Duc Hoa Villagers Toward the U.S. and Americans
by Gender or Age

Opinions about U.S.	Total (238)	Gender		Age			
		Male (141)	Female (97)	12-29 (60)	30-49 (121)	50+ (57)	
		----- Percent -----					
Is there anti-American feeling in your community?							
Yes	11	9	13	18	8	9	
Yes, but only a few people	44	43	47	52	41	44	
No or don't know	45	48	39	30	50	47	
Has the presence of the Americans been beneficial to the people of Vietnam?							
Great benefit	30	32	29	33	26	37	
Some benefit	44	44	43	32	50	44	
Scarcely or no benefit	21	24	28	35	24	19	
Whether or not you think Americans have helped Vietnam, do you like them personally?							
Like	79	78	80	70	80	86	
Dislike or hate	21	22	20	30	20	14	
How do you think the American character harmonizes with the Vietnamese character?							
Good harmony	58	57	54	48	55	63	
Disharmony	33	14	10	23	9	7	
On which side does most of the hostility lie?							
Vietnamese side	10	10	9	17	7	9	
Equal or both	48	44	47	48	45	54	
American side	42	41	43	35	48	37	

Note: Chi-square tests for gender or age differences in opinion were not significant at the .05 level.

Differences in response patterns for men and women to both opinion questions were minor; however more difference was observed by age, particularly with regard to harmony between the two national characters. Younger villagers were *least* likely to perceive "good" harmony (48%) and those 50 years old or older were *most* likely (63%) to do so. Attribution of reason or cause for the

hostility was perceived quite differently by the young and old. Young adults were twice as likely as older adults (17% vs. 8%) to place the blame on the Vietnamese government. Middle age adults were *most* likely to blame the U.S. (48%) and older adults (54%) to blame both countries.

Because age is a factor in the amount of personal experience villagers had with Americans, the war, and the pre-communist era; it was anticipated that contemporary opinions and beliefs about Americans and the U.S. would be strongly associated with age. This analysis found only a modest but rather consistent pattern of association between age and these opinions. There was even less gender effect on villagers' opinions.

To carry the analysis of Duc Hoa villagers' opinions about the U.S. and Americans further, a test for association between the five opinions was conducted by analyzing for logical consistency among the five opinions. Findings revealed that villagers who believed anti-American sentiment exists within the village were much less likely to consider the U.S. presence in South Vietnam beneficial to the Vietnamese, to like Americans personally, and to believe there is "good" harmony between the Vietnamese and American characters than villagers who believed that anti-American sentiment exists in Duc Hoa. Moreover, villagers who believed the American presence in Vietnam had been beneficial were more likely to like Americans personally (94% versus 72%) and to believe good harmony exists between the two national characters (78% versus 45%).

Villagers who like Americans personally were more likely than those who don't like Americans to view the American presence in Vietnam as beneficial, to believe that good harmony exists between the two characters and to consider hostility between the two countries to be more on the American side. The fact that only 50 villagers (about 21%) said they disliked Americans make generalization from these data tentative. However, a personal dislike for Americans is strongly associated with a villagers' negative view of the U.S.

The 1992 Duc Hoa survey also asked villagers about their satisfaction with their current life. Many (two-thirds) reported dissatisfaction with life (Table 3). Women were somewhat more likely to be dissatisfied than men and older people were more likely dissatisfied than younger adults. Villagers who rated the government performance adequate were more often satisfied with their life than those who rated the government performance inadequate. Also, satisfied villagers more often wished for peace and unity for Vietnam while those who were dissatisfied with government performance wished for a government more responsive to their needs.

Life satisfaction also impacted on villagers' opinions about the U.S. and Americans. Compared to villagers dissatisfied with their life, those satisfied were more likely to believe that anti-American feeling exists within Duc Hoa, that the presence of the U.S. in South Vietnam was not beneficial, and that they disliked Americans personally. All three associations were statistically significant.

TABLE 3
1991 Opinions of Duc Hoa Villagers About Personal Satisfaction
and the Condition of Vietnamese Affairs by Gender and Age

Opinions	Gender		Age		
	Male	Female	12-29	30-49	50+
	----- Percent -----				
I am:					
satisfied with life	34	31	37	32	30
dissatisfied with life	66	69	63	67	70
How well does the Vietnamese government perform?					
adequately					
inadequately	44	39	45	40	42
	56	61	55	60	58
What do you consider the most important problem facing Vietnam?					
the economy	29	31	33	24	39
relations with U.S.	58	59	55	65	49
other	13	10	12	11	12
Whose responsibility is it to improve community life?					
the government	26	27	22	27	30
the people	34	37	33	30	49
both	40	36	45	43	21

Note: Chi-square tests for gender or age differences in opinion were not significant at the .05 level.

One interpretation of these findings is that satisfied villagers are those who have fared well under the communist system, whereas the dissatisfied are those who were involved with the war effort and associated with the displaced South Vietnam government and U.S. military presence in the area. As a result they suffered discrimination and had been denied governmental services and assistance.

HISTORICAL COMPARISONS

How do these opinions of Duc Hoa villagers compare to those described by the polls conducted during the 1965-1972 period of U.S. involvement in the

country? Questions identical to those asked in the Duc Hoa village survey had been asked in the JUSPAO and PAAS surveys conducted 20 to 25 years earlier. Although the PAAS surveys queried both rural and urban South Vietnamese, only the rural results are reported here.

One question asked at both points in time dealt with the sources of information available to rural people. The methods by which rural residents obtain national and world news appear to have changed little in the 20 years since the Americans left South Vietnam. When villagers were asked their information sources about local, national and international affairs, the only change over time was in their access to radio news. About half of rural people in 1971 had access to a radio compared to 64 percent of Duc Hoa villagers in 1992, Table 4. The absence of television sets both in 1971 and 1992 indicates the virtual nonexistence of TV and satellite technology in rural Vietnam. Moreover, the lack of newspaper usage was observed in both 1971 (6%) and 1992 (4%). In 1971, 28 percent of rural people nationally obtained their news from friends, neighbors, and local officials compared to 16 percent of Duc Hoa residents in 1992. In terms of linkage to the national and internal scene, the rural Vietnamese appear no better informed in 1992 than they were during the war era.

TABLE 4
Comparison of Major Information Sources Reported in the 1971 (PAAS) and the 1992 Duc Hoa Village Surveys

Major information sources	Duc Hoa 1992 Village	PAAS 1991 Rural
	-----Percent-----	
How do you get information about national, international, and local affairs?		
Radio	64	49
TV and Newspaper	8	9
Local Officials	7	16
Friends and Neighbors	9	12
None	12	13
(Number of respondents)	(238)	(1,732)

* The PAAS tables do not always sum up to 100% because some respondents failed to answer the question.

Within this context of limited international awareness we compared opinions for the two time periods. The contrast in responses was pronounced between the 1971 PAAS surveys of the rural South Vietnamese people and the 1992 Duc Hoa village survey. Opinions about the U.S. and Americans in the two time periods

revealed that villagers held a more widespread perception that anti-American feeling exists in 1992 than was reported in 1971 (Table 5). Only 18 percent of rural residents in 1971 compared to 56 percent of Duc Hoa villagers believed anti-American feeling existed in their area. However, most of this anti-American feeling in both time periods was attributed to "only a few local people," 13 and 45 percent respectively. The vast majority (80%) believed no such feeling existed in 1971 compared to 44 percent of villagers in 1992. Opinions were more similar on what the U.S. presence meant to the Vietnamese people. In 1971, 79 percent of rural people believed the presence of Americans was of "great or some" benefit to South Vietnam compared to 72 percent of villagers in 1992 who believed this was true. Twice as many villagers (27%) thought the American presence had been of no benefit or had been bad for Vietnam compared to 13 percent of rural people in 1971. Just the opposite was discovered when people were asked if they "liked Americans personally." A liking of Americans was reported by 37 percent of rural people in 1971 compared to 79 percent of villagers in 1992. The proportion of people indicating "hate" for Americans was small at 3 and 5 percent respectively for both 1971 and 1992.

TABLE 5
Opinions of South Vietnamese Living in Duc Hoa Village in 1992
Compared to Those of Rural Vietnamese in 1971

Opinions	Duc Hoa Villagers 1992	Rural People PAAS 1971*
	-----Percent-----	
Is there anti-American feeling in your community?		
Yes	5	11
Yes, but only by a few	13	45
No	82	44
Has the presence of the Americans been beneficial to the people of Vietnam? (some to great)	72	79
Whether or not you think Americans have helped Vietnam, do you like them personally? (like)	79	37
How do you think the American character harmonizes with the Vietnamese character? (good)	54	30

(table continues)

Opinions	Duc Hoa Villagers 1992	Rural People PAAS 1971*
	-----Percent-----	
On which side does most of the hostility lie?		
American	42	10
Vietnamese	10	35
Both sides	48	55

*PAAS tables do not always sum up to 100% because some respondents failed to answer the question; and the number of PASS respondents varies because not all questions were asked in every survey.

There was widespread belief among Duc Hoa villagers that good harmony exists between the Vietnamese and American characters (54%). By comparison, only 30 percent of rural respondents in 1971 believed good harmony existed. However, a large difference was noted between those who believed this lack of harmony or existence of hostility was on the American side (42%) in 1992 versus only 9 percent in 1971.

During the war years, 35 percent of rural people believed the reason for hostility between the U.S. and Vietnam lay on the Vietnamese side compared to only 10 percent of villagers. Those who believed the hostility lay equally on both sides remained about the same in both time periods (55% in 1971 and 48% in 1992).

Comparative opinions about the state of Vietnamese political affairs differed markedly between the 1971 and 1992 surveys, Table 6. More than half (58%) of Duc Hoa villagers rated their government's performance "inadequate" compared to only 29 percent of rural residents in 1971. The proportions tempering their positive evaluation with "as well as can be expected under the circumstances" was 30 percent in 1971 and 25 percent in 1992. Because political conditions differed so markedly between the two time periods, caution must prevail in interpreting this difference. Current conditions under a communist government probably reflect the more open political climate of a peacetime era even under a repressive regime. Conversely, the wartime conditions prevailing in 1971 may have caused suppression of dissatisfaction by a somewhat democratic government. In peacetime, public concern often becomes more fractured with discontent prevailing toward the government regardless of its political persuasion.

When asked who's responsibility it is to improve community life, the contrasting philosophies of people power versus governmental power was reflected. Villagers in 1992 were more often oriented toward local responsibility than was true in 1971. The majority orientation was the people and government working together in both periods with this orientation more prevalent in 1992 than it was in 1971, 73 percent versus 59 percent, respectively.

TABLE 6
Opinions About the Role of Government Held by Duc Hoa Villagers
in 1992 Compared to Those of Rural Vietnamese in 1971

Opinions	Duc Hoa Village 1992	Rural People PAAS 1971
	-----Percent-----	
How well does your government perform?		
adequately or as well as can be expected	42	47
inadequately	58	29
Whose responsibility is it to improve community life?		
Both people	73	59
Government	27	41

The final opinion replicated in the Duc Hoa village survey was taken from a JUSPAO survey conducted in 1965. This question focused on how people assessed their personal life situation. No distinction was made between rural and urban respondents in the JUSPAO survey so the clarity of interpreting rural trends over time is even more precarious here than it was with the PAAS findings that specifically identified a rural sample. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that some reordering of people's priorities may have occurred during the intervening 28 years. In response to the lead phrase "my greatest wish is for"—Duc Hoa villagers expressed less concern for economic goals, i.e. better working conditions and a lower cost of living (29%) than 1965 survey respondents (42%). Too, there was a slight trend away from immediate concerns to those of peace and the integration of Vietnam into the world community (29% in 1965 and 36% in 1992) and for a government more responsive to the needs of the people (29% in 1965 and 34% in 1992).

Responses to the question "Are you satisfied with life?" revealed only a modest difference in the proportion of satisfied and dissatisfied persons at each point in time. More Duc Hoa villagers were dissatisfied (67%) than was the case for the wartime national sample (59%). It does not appear that the end of the war and passage of 28 years has had much impact on the perception of life satisfaction in a gross sense. However, this may only be the result of using a combined rural-urban assessment for 1965 and an early point for U.S. involvement in South Vietnamese political and economic affairs.

TABLE 7
Comparison of Personal Assessments of Life Quality Reported in
the 1965 Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO) Attitude and 1992
Duc Hoa Village Surveys

Quality of Life	Duc Hoa 1992 Village	JUSPAO 1965 Nationwide
	-----Percent-----	
Are you satisfied with life?		
Satisfied	33	41
Dissatisfied	67	59
(Number)	(238)	(5,624)

*JUSPAO did not distinguish between rural and urban

CONCLUSIONS

In this study two major points were the foci of attention: 1) What are the current views of the rural Vietnamese toward the U.S., Americans and Vietnamese affairs? and 2) How do these opinions compare with these held by the rural Vietnamese in the war years between 1965 and 1972? The observations and on-site experiences of the principal author who was stationed in the village of Duc Hoa (1967-68) and returned for several weeks in 1992 were the sources of data. Much had changed in the village during the intervening 28 years following departure of the last American soldier/advisor from this rural village in the former South Vietnam; yet much remained the same. In many ways the village and its people seemed to have changed little. Upon his return to Duc Hoa, the principal author was greeted warmly by most village residents. Moreover, his visit had been anticipated with much interest as news spread that an American GI was returning to the village. As part of this visit the Duc Hoa village survey was conducted.

The 1992 village survey revealed the absence of any widespread anti-American feeling within the village and leads to the generalization that this may be true also across rural "South Vietnam." Similarly, the vast majority of villagers said they personally like Americans. Although many South Vietnamese fled the country before the 1975 take-over by North Vietnam and found asylum in the U.S. leaving family and kin behind, it is doubtful that any Duc Hoa villagers were among those who fled to the U.S. Also, the limited access to national and world news that still prevails in Duc Hoa, gives reason to expect that any favorable or positive beliefs about the U.S. would have disappeared as a result of government attempts to vilify the U.S. and to re-educate the people. But this does not appear to have happened. In many ways the positive view of the U.S. and Americans is similar to what it was during the war era.

The Duc Hoa villagers did seem more aware that a few local residents were hostile to Americans but believed that most "liked" Americans. The majority of villagers believed the people of Vietnam had benefitted from the American presence in their country.

We anticipated that women and men might hold different opinions about the U.S. and Americans, as well as on other issues. This was not the case. Little gender difference was found for any of the opinions studied. Much the same picture existed for age. We anticipated that the opinions of young adults would be more in line with the government's position on issues, then would the opinions of older adults. Our reasoning was that older persons had totally different life experiences under the French colonial system, lived through the war period with the presence of South Vietnamese troops and American advisors stationed in the village, and were exposed to the post-war re-education and restrictive communist era. Although opinions were observed to differ somewhat by age, these differences were seldom significant.

After a 28 year absence from rural Vietnam, we conclude that the U.S. is perceived in a positive way by the majority of the rural Vietnamese people and, for-the-most part, will be welcomed to the countryside.

NOTES

1. One of the authors was stationed in the Duc Hoa area for two years as a military advisor (1967 and 1968).

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