

Martyrs of Development: Taiwanese Agrarian Development and the Republic of Vietnam, 1959–1975

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Abstract

In 1959, the Republic of China (ROC) government on Taiwan enacted its first international agrarian development mission to the Republic of Vietnam (RVN). The mission began modestly to assist primarily with crop improvement and farmers' associations. But by the fall of the RVN in 1975, Taiwanese development constituted a global project of the authoritarian Guomindang (GMD) regime to redefine Taiwan's place in the world. This article explores the sixteen-year span of missions to Vietnam, drawing on reports by Taiwanese agricultural team leaders, oral history interviews with Taiwanese technicians, Taiwanese and Vietnamese policy documents, and visual and propaganda materials published by the GMD and overseas Chinese. Agrarian development became a platform through which the ROC represented Taiwanese success at agricultural science and rural modernity. Taiwanese technicians showcased high-yielding crop varieties, large and luscious green vegetables, and rationalized agricultural implements. Simultaneously, Taiwanese teams also emphasized their rural roots, through an expertise in forming farmers' associations that appealed to RVN leadership seeking to battle communist insurgency. These representations of success and sacrifice allowed the GMD regime to portray the ROC as leading a global vanguard of developing nations, all toward the goal of securing its legitimacy at home as a developmentalist regime.

Keywords: Taiwan, Guomindang, Vietnam, agrarian development, rural development, agricultural science, farmers' associations, Cold War

Introduction

On November 13, 1963, Taiwanese rice technician Zhang Dusheng (張篤生, Chang Tusun) was in a jeep returning to Saigon after visiting a rice experiment station approximately 70 kilometers (43.5 miles) outside the city, when his convoy was

ambushed by Vietnamese communist forces and he was killed by gunfire.¹ In the subsequent months, Zhang was made into a martyr, not of war but, rather, of development. *Cheng Hsin Daily News* (*Zhengxin xinwenbao* 徵信新聞報, later renamed *China Times* [*Zhongguo shibao* 中國時報]), a pro-government and pro-Guomindang (Nationalist Party, or GMD) newspaper in Taiwan, wrote that Zhang was “one of the many technical experts who are away from their homes to help foreign nations, as under-developed as or more under-developed than ours, in developing their resources. They have enabled many [foreign nations] to understand more correctly of [*sic*] the industrious spirit and the scientific knowledge of our countrymen. Their contribution[s] in foreign countries are as great as in their own country.”²

In the dozens of newspaper articles, interviews, and speeches that followed, Zhang’s martyrdom forged a new narrative of Taiwan’s engagement with the world. Following its defeat at the hands of the Chinese Communist Party, the ruling GMD regime framed the Republic of China’s (ROC) international affairs around an existential battle with communism and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) regime. As I show in this article, agrarian development missions to Vietnam starting in 1959 expanded this narrative beyond retaking mainland China from the Chinese Communists to include development. The ROC was demonstrating its technology, perseverance, and modernity to the Global South. In the rural villages of Vietnam, dozens of Taiwanese teams worked side by side with Vietnamese farmers to showcase greener, lusher vegetables, more efficient and practical farm implements, and stronger Taiwanese rural organizations. The fervent anticommunism of the Cold War was present, but it was complemented by a new narrative of development rooted in the discourse of modernity and strength through economic self-sufficiency. By the 1970s and 1980s, with the thawing of the Cold War in East Asia, economic growth and success increasingly became an important point of legitimacy and state power for the GMD to the extent that they eventually eclipsed the Cold War anticommunism as predominant topics of state discourse.

Development—the practice of improving well-being and livelihoods, usually through “modern” methods of agricultural science, capitalism, or rural organizations—was, in its initial international implementation in 1959, imagined by Taiwanese planners as a limited, “technical” endeavor. “Technical” was often a misleading descriptor,

¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Telegram, November 14, 1963; “駐越農技團工作及協助華僑籌建紗廠及張篤生遇難等” [The work of the agricultural technical team in Vietnam, assisting overseas Chinese in preparation to construct a textile factory, the killing of Zhang Dusheng, etc.]; Archive Number [館藏號] 020-011004-0101; page 38; Ministry of Foreign Affairs Collection, Academia Sinica Modern History Institute Archives (hereafter MFAC ASMHIA).

² “Condolence to Tusun Chang,” *Cheng Hsin Daily News*, Taipei, November 17, 1963. Translated document located in Folder 842, Bản dịch các bài báo Taiwan liên quan đến cái chết của ông Tu-Sun-Chang, thành viên phái đoàn kỹ thuật canh nông Trung Hoa Dân Quốc đến Việt Nam năm 1963 [Translation of Taiwan articles related to the death of Tusun Chang [Zhang Dusheng], member of the ROC agricultural technical team to Vietnam 1963], Nha Canh Nông [Directorate of Agriculture], Vietnam National Archives II (hereafter VNA).

however, as anthropologist James Ferguson (1990) has argued in his study of development in Lesotho, and by the 1970s Taiwanese development missions were not just about technical assistance. Since its takeover of Taiwan in 1945, the GMD regime has been involved in an ongoing development project of disciplining and restructuring the island's rural society through farmers' associations, public health, financialized capital, land reform, and modern technoscience. Taiwanese overseas development in the Vietnam context attempted to bring to Taiwan the lessons of development, such as the utility of farmers' associations as instruments of extending state control and making rural society legible. As this article demonstrates, over the decades, development evolved into an important platform that enabled the state to build a new globally derived identity centered on modernity, and subsequently wield through knowledge dissemination and propaganda to consolidate its authority.

International development marked a new frontier for Taiwan's interactions with the world. The 1959 Vietnam mission was the first such effort that placed Taiwanese technicians and experts in rural areas outside the island. This initial mission was modest in scope—just over a dozen technicians, specializing in plant breeding, fisheries, and farmers' associations, who were then tasked with aiding Vietnamese state-led efforts in crop improvement and rural welfare. From the ROC perspective, anticommunism and GMD leader and dictator Chiang Kai-shek's quest to form Cold War alliances provided geopolitical incentives for offering assistance. By the mid-1960s, technical assistance to the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) and other noncommunist Asian regimes became a significant complement to military assistance.³ Chiang incorrectly believed that North Vietnam was completely controlled by the PRC regime. He viewed actions in Vietnam as part of a greater international anticommunist strategy that could not be limited to the borders of any one country, and development offered an additional means to stop Chinese Communist advances.⁴ Development became an increasingly vital tool in ROC international diplomacy. In turn, development grew more influential in shaping the Taiwanese state and national identity.

The Vietnam missions were especially significant as the first international development missions undertaken by Taiwan. Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, Taiwanese agrarian missions expanded from one to two dozen, covering every corner of the developing world—Asia, Africa, the South Pacific, and Latin America. The African missions during that period were a form of development diplomacy and a cornerstone of ROC foreign policy, especially because the ROC was under threat from PRC-allied communist bloc measures to remove the ROC from the United Nations. ROC officials traded agricultural development assistance for votes from newly decolonized, UN-voting member-states from the African continent (J. Lin 2015; Liu 2006; Wang 2004). There,

³ The ROC had several groups of military officials and advisors to the RVN following a 1960 meeting between Chiang Kai-shek and Ngô Đình Diệm. For more details, see Lin HT (2015, 288–291).

⁴ This was a sentiment relayed via the U.S. Embassy in Taipei, and not a direct quotation of Chiang. Telegram, "President Appreciation for Actions of Non-Communist Asian Peoples in Vietnam," 7/27/65, #13, "China," Country File, NSF, Box 238, Lyndon B. Johnson Library.

they deployed many of the lessons learned in the Vietnam missions, including evoking the discourse of Third World solidarity and commonality between Taiwan and African (or Vietnamese) peoples, as well as the importance of non-Western methods of achieving postcolonial strength and independence.

From 1959 until the end of the Second Indochina War (Vietnam War) in 1975, the once-limited Vietnam teams represented a new means of legitimacy for the ROC regime. Through development missions, ROC planners demonstrated that they were developed enough to help foreign nations achieve the same growth and rural living standards of Taiwan. At home, this evidence of technical mastery reinforced a new facet of ROC authoritarianism and state power—the celebration of the modern, economically independent nation that staked its claim internationally as much as domestically, and on equal grounds with the West. No longer was the ROC a developing nation, but a nation whose advanced agrarian development brought demand for its expertise globally, and put it at the global vanguard.

Scholars have largely overlooked the importance of agrarian development for understanding modern Taiwanese history, and have overlooked the impact of Taiwan in global development history. In the English-language literature, political scientist John Garver has written about ROC assistance to Vietnam, albeit briefly and only within a diplomatic context (Garver 1997). In the Chinese-language literature, historian Lin Hsiao-ting has written on the ROC- RVN diplomatic relationship, focusing mostly on military assistance (Lin HT 2018). Most consequentially, historian Simon Toner has written about how RVN officials under President Nguyễn Văn Thiệu looked to Taiwan and South Korea as potential development models (Toner 2017). Toner makes the important claim that Vietnamese officials found relevance in their Asian neighbors instead of the United States or the West because “Taiwan and South Korea offered an alternative model of governance that appealed to the [government of Vietnam]: depoliticized masses, loyal to the authoritarian state and mobilized for economic development” (Toner 2017, 782). Like Taiwan, South Korea and Japan also engaged in international development, especially in Southeast Asia where for decades they rendered agricultural, medical, and infrastructural development (Mizuno, Moore, and DiMoia 2018). For RVN leaders, Taiwan represented a “romance” or “imagining” of what an idealized RVN could be: a developed, authoritarian state.

Integrating archival sources from Taiwan, Vietnam, and the United States—as well as an oral history interview with a retired Taiwanese technician deployed to Vietnam—this article traces how Taiwanese experts attempted to transplant elements of their own modernity abroad. It then shows how the development project in Vietnam became an imaginary for the Taiwanese. The purpose of development was as much performative as modernizing, and that performance was in furtherance of ROC objectives to portray itself as a modern, technologically advanced, humanitarian, and prosperous society to the Global South and especially to those at home. Thus, this article follows how the GMD regime presented its overseas development to a fractured Taiwanese audience to further its regime legitimization and consolidation, and how it portrayed development

to a Vietnamese and global audience as evidence of its commitment to “Free World” friendship and anticommunist internationalism.

Why Taiwan? Vietnam and the Rural Problem

In 1955, Ngô Đình Diệm took power as president of the newly declared Republic of Vietnam in a coup that deposed Bảo Đại, the head of the State of Vietnam. Diệm was a fervent anticommunist and nationalist opposed to both French colonial presence in the State of Vietnam, as well as Hồ Chí Minh’s Democratic Republic of Vietnam regime that occupied Vietnam north of the 17th parallel. By then, U.S. aid had been increasing after French losses to communist insurgency in Indochina, and Vietnam was seen as a crucial territory that required U.S. guidance and tutelage (Miller 2013, 72). Several prominent American development experts were appointed to serve in Vietnam, including Wolf Ladejinsky, the land reform expert attached to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. As historian Edward Miller has observed, experts like Ladejinsky and others in charge of technical aid and rural development policy in Vietnam all had prior experience in other Asian countries (Miller 2013, 79). This was certainly the case for William H. Fippin, Director of Agriculture for U.S. Operations Mission to Vietnam (USOM/Vietnam).

Before he served as Director of Agriculture for USOM/Vietnam, Fippin was one of two American commissioners from 1952 to 1957 for the Sino-American Joint Commission on Rural Reconstruction (JCRR) in Taiwan. Consisting of five commissioners—three Taiwanese and two American—the JCRR was tasked with formulating agricultural policy for the entire island. Fippin was a farmers-organization specialist who had overseen several of the farmers’-association reforms in the early years of JCRR tenure.⁵ As a result of his five years with the JCRR, Fippin not only was intimately familiar with the operations and expertise of the JCRR in farmers’ associations, but also believed that Taiwan was a particularly successful case of agricultural development.

In 1957, the International Cooperation Administration (one of the predecessors to the U.S. Agency for International Development) reassigned Fippin to Vietnam, an area of increasing security concern. Shortly after his arrival, Fippin wrote to his former colleague, JCRR Commissioner Shen Zonghan 沈宗瀚, that “the agricultural program is the largest and in their eyes most important (except of course the military)” for the Vietnamese, especially in the context of seeking American aid to fight the growing communist threat⁶

⁵ Jiang Menglin to W. I. Myers, May 23, 1951; Archival Collection Number [入藏登錄號] 034000000351A; Folder “Myers, W. I.,” in “Shen Zonghan Letter Drafts” [沈宗瀚文件稿]; Council of Agriculture [農委會], Executive Yuan Collection [行政院], Academia Historica Archives [國史館] (hereafter EYC AHA).

⁶ Letter from William H. Fippin to Shen Zonghan, August 31, 1957; Archive Number 034000000337A, “沈宗瀚文件稿 (4箱)” [Shen Zonghan document drafts (“Fippin, W. F.”)]; Council of Agriculture, EYC AHA.

On April 4, 1959, in a memorandum to the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, a Taiwanese Foreign Affairs official in Vietnam wrote that “in discussion with USOM Agricultural Director Fippin and Vietnam Agricultural and Forestry Minister Lê Văn Đổng, the U.S. has prepared US\$300,000, to invite twenty or thirty foreign agricultural experts to provide assistance.”⁷ The initial decision to invite Taiwanese experts was made largely at the behest of Fippin, stemming from his experience as JCRR commissioner. The Taiwanese official in Vietnam continued, “Because of Fippin having been in Taiwan for many years, and having worked well with many people within our agricultural circles, he has strongly advocated to invite [experts] from our side. The RVN Agricultural and Forestry Minister, however, is interested in hiring French experts.”⁸ The RVN preference for French experts was unsurprising given the long colonial relationship between France and Indochina. The decision to choose Taiwanese experts was unusual because it broke with colonial preferences for French experts, marking the power of American advisors under Diệm. It was not Vietnam’s first exposure to Taiwanese development, however.

Vietnamese officials in Bảo Đại’s State of Vietnam (1945–1954), which preceded Ngô Đình Diệm’s Republic of Vietnam government, had been observing the developments of the JCRR in China and Taiwan as early as 1949. In a document from the State of Vietnam Ministry of Public Works and Transportation (Bộ Công Chánh và Giao Thông), possibly a translation of English JCRR documents by Vietnamese officials, the JCRR was described as focused on “bringing earnings to the rural population” and “also recognizing the value of long term research and education.”⁹ The document continued to explain that the JCRR was not a program designed to funnel large amounts of U.S. currency “because experience has shown in Asia, it was difficult, at least in the beginning, to expend large sums quickly and in a reasonable (wise) manner. On the contrary, it is a lively, dynamic program that begins by finding what is necessary for an ordinary farming family (*une famille ordinaire d’agriculteurs*).”¹⁰ Although it is not entirely clear where this translation originated, it was most likely read by officials of the Ministry of Public Works and Transportation. In contrast to development programs that are seen as highly capital-intensive, a picture of the JCRR emerges as a program more attuned to the needs of the rural peasant.

Nonetheless, the decision to invite Taiwanese development experts in 1959 should be attributed mostly to the presence of William Fippin. Fippin’s position as head of

⁷ Letter to Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs (次長), April 4, 1959, “駐越農技團,” [Agricultural technical team in Vietnam]; Archival Collection Number [入藏登錄號] 020000030452A; Ministry of Foreign Affairs Collection, Academia Historica Archives (hereafter MFAC AHA).

⁸ Letter from William H. Fippin to Shen Zonghan, August 31, 1957.

⁹ Programme de la Commission Mixte Pour la Reconstruction Rurale en Chine [Program of the Joint Commission for Rural Reconstruction in China], 1949, Folder 02, Tài liệu về chương trình tái thiết nông thôn Trung Quốc năm 1948–1949 [Documents of the rural reconstruction plan in China 1948–1949], Bộ Công Chánh và Giao Thông [Ministry of Public Works and Transportation], VNA.

¹⁰ Programme de la Commission Mixte Pour la Reconstruction Rurale en Chine [Program of the Joint Commission for Rural Reconstruction in China], 1949, Folder 02, VNA.

USOM/Vietnam Agriculture and as former head of the JCRR gave him a direct link to the Taiwanese, but there were also intellectual reasons behind the choice beyond mere coincidence and convenience.

RVN leaders believed its rural problems to be social and economic in nature. The countryside was where the National Liberation Front (called “Việt Cộng,” or Vietnamese Communists, by anticommunists in the South) operated and drew support. Both the RVN and the United States thus targeted rural areas, leading to “pacification” counterinsurgency campaigns beginning in 1954 (and even earlier under French colonial rule and the State of Vietnam), and the Strategic Hamlet Program of 1962 designed to bring counterinsurgency military tactics to the countryside (Stewart 2011, 49; Miller 2013, 233; Carter 2008, 123).

However, the two allies differed in their approaches for programs to counter communist insurgency. Fippin and other U.S. officials realized that Diệm’s demands were centered on amassing as many U.S. dollars with as few strings attached as possible. Fippin sought to discourage this by emphasizing low-cost, high-impact solutions that could be realistically achieved with American assistance. Translated into policy, this emphasis meant focusing on projects that could be easily implemented and would not require significant capital or labor resources. “Water,” Fippin wrote, was the “biggest, and most difficult problem, but one that we can do relatively little about. Problem is too large. Have seen an old French estimate that control of the Mekong would run to the magnitude of several billion U.S. dollars. Will be a long, long time before anything much is done in that direction so all we can do is a dab here and a dab there.”¹¹ Water was indeed a major topic of discussion among twentieth-century development experts, and the Mekong River delta in particular was a target of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation as well as Japanese overseas development (Sneddon 2015; Moore 2014). Fippin, however, was more concerned with factors he believed the Taiwanese could help resolve.

Fippin honed in on practices at which the Taiwanese excelled: “varietal improvement, fertilization, pest control and cultural practices.”¹² These were four core areas of improvement for the JCRR and the background of its agricultural science roots in Republican-era mainland China, as well as in Taiwan under Japanese colonial rule (J. Lin 2015). Taiwan benefited from an extensive hydrological legacy left by Japanese colonialism, and water infrastructure projects continued under the JCRR with U.S. funding. However, Taiwan’s innovations in less expensive and more easily transferable forms of development were more prominent, and certainly noteworthy for Fippin. Finally, Fippin also observed that for “very much of the southern area floating rice is all that can be grown, and yields are pitifully low—slightly over one metric ton per hectare. One crop.”¹³ Taiwanese teams were well versed in high-yield rice selection and breeding, having contributed the semi-dwarfing parent *Dee-geo-woo-gen* (*dijiao wujian*

¹¹ Letter from William H. Fippin to Shen Zonghan, August 31, 1957.

¹² Letter from William H. Fippin to Shen Zonghan, August 31, 1957.

¹³ Letter from William H. Fippin to Shen Zonghan, August 31, 1957.

低角鳥尖) to the miracle rice, IR-8. They were also observant of soil conditions and climate that would welcome non-rice crops, such as corn or mustard greens, which were planted by Taiwanese teams in Vietnam.

Seeds: Translating Taiwanese Science to Vietnamese Contexts

In December 1959, the Republic of China began its development assistance missions to the Republic of Vietnam. The Vietnam missions initially consisted of technicians and scientists specializing in farmers' associations and cooperatives, crop improvement, and fisheries. Over the course of the program's roughly sixteen years, it expanded to more than twenty-four provinces in the RVN (see figure 1) to include veterinary medicine, entomology, soil science, and irrigation.

A major focus of the 1959 mission was crop improvement, with a highly regarded plant breeder Ma Baozhi (馬保之, Paul C. Ma) at its head.¹⁴ Ma began his career as an agricultural scientist in China, graduating in 1929 from one of the preeminent centers of agricultural science, University of Nanking (Jinling daxue 金陵大學), followed by his doctorate in plant breeding at Cornell University, and then a year doing research at Cambridge University.¹⁵ Upon returning to China in 1934, Ma took a position with the National Agricultural Research Bureau (NARB, *Zhongyang nongye yanjiu shiyansuo* 中央農業研究實驗所), in charge of operating the NARB Guangxi Extension Station. In 1944, he was appointed the head of the Agricultural Division within the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MOAF, *Nonglin bu* 農林部) of the ROC, and he later became the Deputy Chief for the Agricultural Rehabilitation Commission established by the MOAF to work with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration in China. After moving to Taiwan with the Nationalist regime, Ma became the dean of the College of Agriculture at the preeminent National Taiwan University. In choosing Ma as the leader of the first Crop Improvement Mission to Vietnam, the ROC sent one of its most experienced and respected plant breeders abroad. After his brief time as head of the Crop Improvement Mission in Vietnam, he spent over a decade employed by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization as the dean of the College of Agriculture at the University of Liberia.

¹⁴ “對外宣傳彩色專刊—中日經濟簡訊、先鋒計畫第三國訓練、中華民國統計提要、歷史經濟資料簿” [Color special issue for foreign dissemination—ROC-Japan economic brief, Operation Vanguard third country training, ROC statistic summary, history and economic resource book], April 1975; Folder “中華民國對外技術合作” [ROC Foreign Technical Cooperation], Vol. 2; Archive Number 36-01-006-025; Ministry of Economic Affairs Collection, Academia Sinica Modern History Institute Archives, Taipei, Taiwan.

¹⁵ Announcement of the Graduate School, Official Publication of Cornell University, July 15, 1933; vol. 25, page 141; Cornell University Library. Announcement of the Graduate School, Official Publication of Cornell University, July 15, 1934; vol. 26, page 157; Cornell University Library.

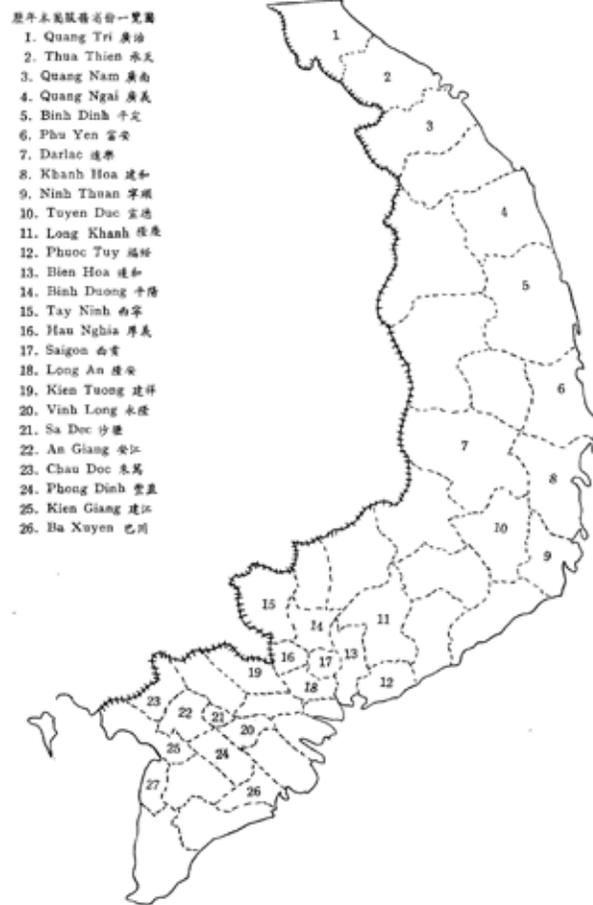


Figure 1. Diagram of the Republic of Vietnam showing provinces where Taiwanese technical assistance was rendered during the first fourteen years of the assistance mission from 1959 to 1973.¹⁶

Under Ma's guidance, the Crop Improvement Mission produced lengthy reports on the state of Vietnamese agriculture. Rice was a key concern, given that Vietnam, like Taiwan, was primarily a rice-consuming culture. In 1964, Taiwanese experts estimated that approximately 2.5 million hectares produced 5 million metric tons of rice annually in Vietnam.¹⁷ One of the key reports, titled "Rice Seed Production in Vietnam," was

¹⁶ Jin Yanggao, "Twelve Years in Vietnam" [十二年越南], June 1973; Joint Commission for Rural Reconstruction; Council of Agriculture Library, Executive Yuan.

¹⁷ This is roughly 6.2 million acres and 5.5 million tons. "越南農村改進部官員來華考察肥料配銷" [Observation on Taiwan fertilizer distribution by Vietnamese officials], September 26, 1964;

published in February 1960.¹⁸ It surveyed and summarized rice production in the RVN, examining each step from production to district farmers, including inspection, storage, distribution, financial subsidies, and dissemination of information. The broad scope of the report mirrored 1950s JCRR reforms in Taiwan, where, in addition to focusing on plant breeding and application of new agricultural seeds and technologies, JCRR technicians also developed farmers' associations that served as intermediaries for providing agricultural credit and selling agricultural products to wholesalers and the market. Taiwanese studies in Vietnam also took into account new ideas of applied economics and agricultural extension that worked hand in hand with surveys and policymaking.

The report's primary concern was plant breeding. The Crop Improvement Team observed that rice produced in Vietnam originated mostly from government-run primary-seed multiplication farms. The rice produced from the primary farms were sent to secondary-seed multiplication farms that then produced enough seeds to be distributed to farmers to plant for the season. One significant problem was at the primary level, multiplication seed was filtered only for off-types, rice varieties not intended for distribution onward. As a result, the team wrote that "the desirable level of purity can hardly be thus maintained," implying that standards for multiplied rice were too lax.¹⁹ Furthermore, selection for the primary-seed multiplication farms was made fifteen years prior to the report, in 1945, and no further selection was performed on a regional basis at the secondary-seed multiplication farm level. The report implied that Vietnam was relying on outdated rice, and that selecting newer varieties would likely improve production. The team suggested instead that the government agencies responsible for rice breeding work closely with the seed multiplication farms in order to select and produce seeds that were suitable for the local regions they supplied.

This recommendation on seed multiplication was in line with the fundamentals of agricultural science of the twentieth century—with its focus on production using disciplined, rationalized practices—that helped define the Green Revolution. In this case, improving the national seed production system adhered to the goal of scientific selection and breeding, which was to create higher-yielding seeds rather than allowing the multiplication of lower-yielding varieties. Localization was also a part of selection, which involved ensuring that varieties accommodated the specific soils, climates, growing seasons, and other conditions in the wide rural areas where seeds would be distributed.

Digital Collection Number 數位典藏號 020-011002-0087; page 15; Ministry of Foreign Affairs Collection, Academia Historica, Taiwan.

¹⁸ Tài liệu của phái bộ kỹ thuật Trung Hoa dân quốc ở Việt Nam về việc sản xuất lúa giống ở Việt Nam năm 1960 [ROC technical team in Vietnam report on Vietnam rice production], February 1960; Folder 1313; Nha Canh Nông [Directorate of Agriculture], VNA.

¹⁹ Tài liệu của phái bộ kỹ thuật Trung Hoa dân quốc ở Việt Nam về việc sản xuất lúa giống ở Việt Nam năm 1960, page 21.

Rationalization also extended to cultural practices, such as maintaining precise and consistent distance between rice seedlings to ensure enough room for growth without underutilizing much needed land. Taiwanese farmers introduced new agricultural implements that could aid Vietnamese farmers in easily marking distances through imprinting grids in the soil (figure 2).



Figure 2. A Taiwanese technician teaching a Vietnamese farmer how to use an implement to mark rice spacing in order to maintain ideal distance while transplanting rice seedlings.²⁰

In the following years, the Chinese Agricultural Technical Mission (CATM), as the ROC teams to Vietnam were collectively known early on, established a rice experiment center in Mỹ Tho, located in the Mekong delta, with experiment stations located throughout Vietnam, including Long Xuyên and Cần Thơ in the Mekong delta, and Phan Rang in southern Vietnam.²¹ The 1968 annual report from the CATM indicated that the Mỹ Tho Experiment Center had collected 710 varieties for comparative trials, including 84 newly introduced foreign varieties from the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in Los Baños in the Philippines, and 37 varieties from Cambodia and Thailand. These were then distributed to the regional experiment stations for field trials to determine which varieties would perform best for each region. The seeds sourced from neighboring Southeast Asian nations reflected the belief among Taiwanese scientists

²⁰ “嚴家淦總統數位照片—臺灣農技團在越南工作成果” [A pictorial representation of highlights of CATM/VN activities], April 1965; Digital Collection Number 006-030202-00011-001; Yan Jiagan Papers, Academia Historica.

²¹ Later CATM was changed to the Chinese Agricultural Technical Group (CATG).

(and IRRI scientists) that different areas of Vietnam shared ecological similarities with much of Southeast Asia. With terrain and geography as varied as central and southern Vietnam, which spanned not just latitude but also topographical, precipitation, and soil variances, development planners saw Vietnam ecologically and not just as a bounded nation-state.

IR-8 rice produced by the IRRI showed impressive yields, nearly doubling the native check variety (used as a control) at 5,744 kg per hectare compared with 3,049 kg/ha.²² IR-8, the IRRI's most famous product, was often called "miracle rice" because of its high yields, and in Vietnam it was sometimes TN-8, short for Thần Nông ("god of agriculture," implying supernatural powers) (Tran and Kajisa 2006). Bred in the early 1960s as a cross of two varieties, Indonesian Peta and Taiwanese Dee-geo-woo-gen, its global dissemination allowed for significant improvements in yield across many South and Southeast Asian rice-growing regions. IR-8 became a defining contributor to the Green Revolution in Asia, though along with monoculture and reliance on chemical fertilizers, it also led to dependence on chemicals and commercialized agriculture with potentially disastrous ecological consequences (Cullather 2010; Shiva 2016). Assistant Director for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/Vietnam, James P. Grant, who was born and raised in Beijing as the son of Canadian missionaries and engaged in a lifelong career in development, wrote to Shen Zonghan of his visit to a Taiwanese demonstration plot near Biên Hòa where IR-8 was being planted. On his second visit a year later, Grant remarked on "the fine work done by your JCRR technicians in Vietnam" in helping to transform the formerly "crude demonstration plot" to "a major rice research center." He included a *New York Times* article showcasing the gift of IR-8 from Vietnam to the United States, a symbol of its gratitude as appreciation for the United States introducing the new cultivar in Vietnam.²³

IR-8, however, did not do well in all field tests. One of IR-8's differentiating characteristics was its semi-dwarfing allele, *sd1*, which it inherited from its Taiwanese parent, Dee-geo-woo-gen. Dwarfing allowed IR-8 stalks be short and stocky and resist toppling, which would submerge rice under water, making it impossible to harvest and thus reducing yields. But, IR-8 in Định Tường and Phong Dinh suffered from the opposite problem. There, due to higher rainfall, water levels in paddy fields were high enough to submerge the shorter dwarf-type rice. The CATM instead suggested earlier plantings in April and November to harvest in July and March and thus avoid flooding later in the season.²⁴ Taiwanese efforts to distribute field tests of different varieties were in recognition of the difficulties of national-scale development across different cultural, social, and ecological contexts. As historian David Biggs has argued, the specificities of place and locality had outsized consequences for American development on the ground

²² This amounts to roughly 5,125 pounds per acre compared with 2,720 pounds per acre.

²³ James P. Grant to Shen Zonghan, November 25, 1968; Archive Number 034000000339A; Folder Document Drafts "G," in "Shen Zonghan Letter Drafts"; EYC AHA.

²⁴ "駐越農技團第四年度工作報告" [Agricultural technical team in Vietnam Fourth Annual Work Report], July 1, 1968; Digital Collection Number 020-011004-0102; MFAC AHA.

in An Giang Province (Biggs 2009). In the Taiwanese missions, the downsides of using IR-8 were avoided by adjusting planting seasons to account for local hydrological conditions. Nonetheless, the unexpected obstacles facing IR-8, known for its miraculous yield and remarkable range of growing regions, exemplified the issues facing development not just by Taiwanese teams in Vietnam but everywhere in the world.

Taiwanese teams expanded beyond rice to include other food crops, including onions, carrots, garlic, sweet potatoes, watermelon, soybean, cabbage, lettuce, peanuts, sorghum, corn, and mung beans (figure 3). Varieties were sourced from countries throughout the Global North and South, such as the United States, Australia, and Korea. Experiment stations run by Taiwanese compared varieties, which could include up to twenty-eight varieties, as in the case of onions ranging from Texas Early Grano 502 to Early Lockyer Brown.²⁵



Figure 3. Photograph comparing the American variety “Dixie Queen” watermelon (*left*) at 14 kilograms (more than 30 pounds) introduced by the Taiwanese agricultural team compared to a native variety (*right*) in Định Tường.²⁶

Chemical fertilizer was another aspect of Green Revolution methods touted by Taiwanese teams simultaneously with seeds. In a 1964 report from the Taiwanese mission to Vietnam to the JCRR, chemical fertilizer was identified as being used “very little” because “rice farmers are not familiar with chemical fertilizers.” Their conclusion was that increased usage was “absolutely necessary.” This conclusion is unsurprising,

²⁵ “駐越農技團第四年度工作報告,” July 1, 1968.

²⁶ “嚴家淦總統數位照片—臺灣農技團在越南工作成果,” April 1965.

given the Green Revolution paradigm of the 1960s that relied heavily on chemicals and varieties that responded well to chemical fertilizer, despite it being short-sighted due to the environmental consequences. Taiwan had utilized chemical fertilizers extensively for decades, dating back to the Japanese colonial era (1895–1945), and relied heavily on chemicals for its own agricultural miracle in the 1950s and 1960s. In the resulting solution, implemented at the recommendation of the Taiwanese team in Vietnam, newly established Vietnamese fertilizer committees (one central and eighteen provincial) sold fertilizers on credit through farmers' associations and cooperatives, similar to the system in Taiwan. The report detailed that logistical issues (tardiness and confusion) were problematic but excusable given how “new” fertilizer was.²⁷

Fertilizer usage similarly followed after rigorous field trials across the rice experiment stations. Across Ba Xuyên, Cần Thơ, Huế, and Phan Rang experiment stations, three types of chemical fertilizers were tested in growing rice at various ratios: Nitrogen (N), Phosphorus Pentoxide (P_2O_5 , or phosphoric acid), and potassium oxide (K_2O , or potash). Responses differed dramatically, with some showing a near-twofold increase in yields, whereas rice grown in Huế responded negatively to fertilizer compared with use without fertilizer.²⁸

In the language of the 1964 report, the Taiwanese team leader described how “fertilizer distribution and utilization in Taiwan, Republic of China, has won praises of countries in Southeast Asia.” This self-affirmation served to encourage Taipei to accept a team of four Vietnamese fertilizer distribution specialists to observe demonstrations of fertilizer distribution and usage in Taiwan, but it nonetheless reinforced a narrative of Taiwan's success being welcomed and recognized by receiving countries like Vietnam in the Global South.²⁹

“Broad Social Strata”: Rural Organizations, Gender, and Agricultural Extension

The ROC team recommended a series of measures centered on agricultural extension and demonstration. An early suggestion during the first year of the mission in early 1960 was to establish demonstration fields for proper planting and care of seeds selected by the state. To complement demonstration, the team suggested providing training in conjunction with 4-T, the Vietnamese equivalent of 4-H in the United States. 4-T was funded by U.S. agricultural development missions in Vietnam (figure 4). Both 4-T and 4-H were rural organizations that integrated agricultural and public health practices as a means of community youth activity. The ROC recommended using 4-T members along with village leaders to disseminate information about seed planting. Other suggestions to aid knowledge dissemination included printed materials, similar to the magazine *Harvest* (*Fengnian* 豐年), introduced by the JCRR in Taiwan. Finally, the report also

²⁷ “越南農村改進部官員來華考察肥料配銷,” September 26, 1964, page 15.

²⁸ “駐越農技團第四年度工作報告,” July 1, 1968.

²⁹ “越南農村改進部官員來華考察肥料配銷,” September 26, 1964, page 15.

suggested that Vietnamese officials establish contests for the highest per-unit area of rice production, in which the “winning farmer will receive [an] award and will be asked to tell other farmers the ways and means by which he achieve[d] [his] goal.”³⁰ By incentivizing demonstration through informal competition, Taiwanese experts were hoping to create new information venues for rural Vietnamese farmers to learn from their own.



Figure 4. Chiang Ching-kuo (蔣經國, Jiang Jingguo), Premier of the ROC and son of Chiang Kai-shek, visits a 4-T (4-H) chapter in Biên Hòa province, Vietnam.³¹

Ma Baozhi departed as the head of the Crop Improvement Mission after a year, in 1960, and was replaced on a more permanent basis by Jin Yanggao (金陽鎬, Yang-kao King), another prominent agronomist from the University of Nanking and protégé of Shen Zonghan. In a report to the JCRR authored after the end of the Vietnam mission in 1972, Jin wrote, “Vietnam’s agricultural environment, cultivation methods, and cultural habits on the whole are very close to those of Taiwan’s. Those who are knowledgeable on the issue all believe that to develop agriculture one must [*bixu* 必須] draw upon the experiences of Taiwan [*yi taiwan wei jiejing* 以台灣為借鏡].”³²

The Vietnam mission was not just focused on the agricultural sciences; the greatest needs of Vietnam were perceived to be social in nature. With the expansion of the Vietnamese communists in northern Vietnam, the RVN prioritized the needs of its farmers, those most vulnerable to communist organization. Despite attempts to replace

³⁰ Tài liệu của phái bộ kỹ thuật Trung Hoa dân quốc ở Việt Nam về việc sản xuất lúa giống ở Việt Nam năm 1960, page 21.

³¹ Jin Yanggao, “Twelve Years in Vietnam,” June 1973, page 58.

³² Jin Yanggao, “Twelve Years in Vietnam,” June 1973, page 4.

French colonial administrators with Vietnamese administrators under Diệm's government, communist insurgency was not stemmed by pacification campaigns. Diệm and other RVN officials turned to rural and community development, which emphasized the community as a durable unit of governance from which positive social change could be replicated from the bottom up and thus throughout rural Vietnam (Immerwahr 2015; Stewart 2017). It was here that William Fippin's aforementioned connection with Taiwan was fateful. In May 1959, approximately one month after Fippin's suggestion to invite Taiwanese experts on farmers' associations, Trần Ngọc Liên, the Commissioner General for Cooperatives and Agricultural Credit, traveled to Taiwan with Fippin and several other RVN officials to observe Taiwanese farmers' associations firsthand. After the trip, Liên formally requested Taiwanese experts in farmers' associations and cooperatives. Ten Taiwanese agricultural experts were requested to be sent to the RVN on a six-month provisional basis, to "work especially at village levels," he said, "encouraging, guiding, training, and assisting Vietnam's newly formed farmers' associations to get firmly established and operating."³³ Along with teams from other "Free World" nations brought in through U.S. mediation, the work of the Taiwanese technical mission would help form the basis of counter-communist insurgency efforts that were designed to win the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese peasants.

On October 27, 1959, RVN Vice President Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ sent the objectives and scope of the Taiwanese assistance mission in farmers' associations to eleven province chiefs.³⁴ The October agreement increased the Taiwanese technicians to eleven, of which eight were focused on establishing farmers' associations and cooperatives; two on fisheries and crop cooperatives; and the final one on training. The eight men were split into three teams and responsible for vast territories of central and southern Vietnam, roughly four to five provinces per team. After familiarizing themselves with local conditions, the RVN regime placed the onus on local governments "to let these specialist conduct their activities without hindrance" and furthermore "have new ideas and make clear problems that require specialists' help and investigation" to send up to the Central Farmers' Association Committee and central government authorities.³⁵ Though spread thin, the Taiwanese advisors were handed the task of new ideas within

³³ Huỳnh Văn Diễm to William Fippin, April 3, 1959; "駐越農技團 (I)" [Agricultural technical team in Vietnam, vol. 1]; Archival Collection Number 020000030452A; MFAC AHA.

³⁴ Tài liệu của văn bộ Công Chánh và giao thông về chương trình hoạt động của chuyên viên Đài Loan về hiệp hội nông dân và giai đoạn thực hành các cấp hiệp hội nông dân liên hệ đến bộ Công Chánh năm 1959 [1959 correspondence with the Ministry of Public Works regarding the activity plans of Taiwanese specialists in implementing and assisting farmers' associations], October 27, 1959, Folder 202, Bộ Công Chánh và Giao Thông [Ministry of Public Works and Transportation], VNA.

³⁵ Tài liệu của văn bộ Công Chánh và giao thông về chương trình hoạt động của chuyên viên Đài Loan về hiệp hội nông dân và giai đoạn thực hành các cấp hiệp hội nông dân liên hệ đến bộ Công Chánh năm 1959, October 27, 1959, Folder 202.

the local governments that would be actionable, and thus contribute to the South Vietnamese regime's efforts to expand a national rural policy.

Taiwanese farmers'-association experts were called upon to enact a rural development model that emphasized grassroots interactions with farmers. On April 9, 1959, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) sent a memorandum to the Ministry of Economic Affairs. In the memo, MOFA outlined the work details. First, "work comes into contact with broad social strata, including central and local, to the lowest stratum of village farmers' associations."³⁶ Next, "work scope includes matters related to leading, extension, and training, with achieving farmer-association self-sufficiency and independence as the objective."³⁷ These objectives were supplemented by goals of the farmers' association to "produce agricultural products."³⁸ The focus on the lowest levels of Vietnamese social strata reflected the rural emphasis of development from the Taiwanese model and the desire to engage at the village level. The Taiwanese success at organizing and utilizing farmers' associations to extend agricultural knowledge and distribute fertilizer matched the Vietnamese needs.

In defining how these projects would be carried out, Taipei chose a different approach from the United States. Whereas U.S. development agencies such as the International Cooperation Administration chose to send experts with extensive scientific training for its missions abroad, Taiwanese planners predominantly sought blue-collar technicians to work directly with Vietnamese farmers. As MOFA's April 9 memorandum continued, Taiwanese "workers do not require higher education, but rather require long term service in farmers' associations or related organizations as well as wide ranging practical experience managing farmers' associations or related organizations."³⁹ This change was pragmatic, reflecting the importance of on-the-ground experience interacting with "the lowest stratum" of rural society. It also saved on costs—technicians received significant hardship bonuses for working abroad in Vietnam, and many were eager to take the salary bump. Even the relatively few scientists who led the technical teams were represented as working in the rural countryside with Vietnamese farmers. In reports written for audiences outside Taiwan, especially Americans and "Free World" allies like the RVN, Taiwanese documents presented university science professors as working "shoulder to shoulder" with Vietnamese farmers.⁴⁰

An interview with Zhang Jiming 張基明, a retired Taiwanese technician who worked in Vietnam from 1968 to 1969, indicated that the majority of technicians were recruited from agricultural vocational schools (*nongxiao* 農校). Zhang graduated from Taichung Agricultural Vocational High School (Taizhong gaonong 台中高農) in agronomy

³⁶ Memo from Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Deputy Minister of Economic Affairs, April 9, 1959, "駐越農技團 (I)" [Agricultural technical team in Vietnam, vol. 1]; Archival Collection Number 020000030452A; MFAC AHA.

³⁷ Memo from Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Deputy Minister of Economic Affairs, April 9, 1959.

³⁸ Memo from Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Deputy Minister of Economic Affairs, April 9, 1959.

³⁹ Memo from Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Deputy Minister of Economic Affairs, April 9, 1959.

⁴⁰ "嚴家淦總統數位照片—臺灣農技團在越南工作成果," April 1965.

(*zonghe nongyi* 綜合農藝). He underwent two months of training designed by the JCRR for technicians performing technical work abroad, and was assigned to a four-person team approximately 35 kilometers (nearly 22 miles) northwest of Saigon. Zhang engaged in all manner of work, from demonstration to extension, thus showing local Vietnamese farmers how to plant rice, grains, vegetables, and use agricultural equipment (figure 5). At each stage, representatives from local Vietnamese farmers' associations were invited to their Taiwanese team's demonstration farm. Usually every day after dinner, Taiwanese technicians held meetings for one to two hours to teach about ten Vietnamese farmers different agronomic techniques.⁴¹ Taiwanese technicians also trained a number of Vietnamese farmers to serve as extension agents, who then qualified to serve as instructors for other Vietnamese farmers (figure 6).



Figure 5 (*left*). National Taiwan University Professor C. I. Lin (*left*) demonstrates transplanting rice “shoulder to shoulder” with Vietnamese farmers.⁴²

Figure 6 (*right*). As part of the agricultural extension and demonstration program, Taiwanese technicians trained selected Vietnamese farmers to serve as demonstration supervisors. This picture shows Taiwanese-trained supervisors teaching soybean-planting methods to other Vietnamese farmers.⁴³

Taiwanese extension and demonstration teams in Vietnam worked not only in agricultural sciences and farmers' associations, but also in “home improvement.” Demonstration centers included rural handicraft production equipment that could be utilized within “home economics,” a gendered notion that home-based labor was also productive labor. In the 1960s, Taiwan rural organizations like 4-H had begun to organize women to produce handicrafts that could then be sold in markets (figure 7). This endeavor was linked to 4-H in the United States, where 4-H originated, and its gendering of boys and girls (Rosenberg 2015). State gendering of Taiwanese rural society, usually along with community development, persisted well into the 1990s with

⁴¹ Zhang Jiming, interview by James Lin, January 14, 2019.

⁴² “嚴家淦總統數位照片—臺灣農技團在越南工作成果,” April 1965.

⁴³ “嚴家淦總統數位照片—臺灣農技團在越南工作成果,” April 1965.

Taiwanese government promotion of married-women's labor to fuel rural home-based production that formed the "satellite factories" of Taiwan's later industrialized economic growth (Hsiung 1996). In Vietnam, women played a prominent role in rural areas. Zhang Jiming indicated that by the time of his arrival in Vietnam, most men were involved in the ongoing war, and thus women often participated in extension and demonstration activities (figure 8).⁴⁴



Figure 7 (left). "Home improvement agents" shown here are using a straw-rope making machine at a Taiwanese demonstration center in Biên Hòa.⁴⁵

Figure 8 (right). Vietnamese farmers visit a Taiwanese demonstration farm.⁴⁶

Although most extension and demonstration activities were performed in person at demonstration centers and farms, they were also complemented by written materials. In Taiwan, farmers' associations and government agents distributed magazines, pamphlets, and other materials as a core strategy in extension. For example, in conjunction with the U.S. Information Service, the JCRR wrote and distributed in rural areas of Taiwan the magazine *Harvest*, which included morality tales, comics, and other means of attracting a wide swath of Taiwanese rural society.

Taiwanese development utilized written materials in Vietnam as well. In one instance in 1973, a Vietnamese request for an emergency shipment of Taiwanese fertilizers and seeds was accompanied with a pamphlet on the proper usage of fertilizer in Vietnamese. The cover, simply titled "Seed and Fertilizer Usage Guide," also indicated that the seeds and fertilizers were "a gift of the Republic of China" with a short message that wished "peace and happiness" to "the prosperous village farmers of the Republic of Vietnam."⁴⁷ The guide elaborated on the technical contents of fertilizer, including

⁴⁴ Interview with Zhang Jiming, January 14, 2019.

⁴⁵ "嚴家淦總統數位照片—臺灣農技團在越南工作成果," April 1965, page 20.

⁴⁶ "嚴家淦總統數位照片—臺灣農技團在越南工作成果," April 1965, page 32.

⁴⁷ "種子及肥料使用說明書" [Seed and fertilizer usage instructions], January 27, 1973. "我緊急支援越南農作物種子及肥料" [ROC emergency aid of agricultural products, seeds, and fertilizer to Vietnam]; page 265; Digital Collection Number 020-011008-0007. MFAC AHA.

chemical composition, but was also a means to showcase the humanitarian actions and goodwill of Taiwanese assistance. Boxes containing vegetable seeds were adorned with flags of the ROC and RVN side by side, showing the origins of the gift along with partnership for the RVN peoples (figure 9).



Figure 9. A Vietnamese recipient of Taiwanese aid. The box is adorned with the two flags of the Republic of China and Republic of Vietnam.⁴⁸

In the official ceremony handing over the roughly fifty thousand packages of seeds and fertilizer, ROC Ambassador to Vietnam Xu Shaochang 許紹昌 gave a speech that outlined ROC perspectives on the alliance. Throughout the speech, he emphasized that the ROC was similar to the RVN in social and cultural terms: the gift was “from one farming people to another.” In relaying the hopes of the ROC, the ambassador’s speech also evoked modernist language of economic prosperity as well as valorization of the rural. The seeds and fertilizer were intended to give “a helping hand to the individual small farmer to stand on his own feet again.” These packages to individual farmers were accompanied by a large amount of “high-yielding hybrid corn seed” that was “designed for the purpose of demonstrating profitable corn-growing in various provinces in Vietnam to pave the way for large-scale production of corn both for domestic use and for export in the future.”⁴⁹ The capitalist language focused on the scientific modernism of high-yielding hybrids in order to achieve high productivity and large export numbers,

⁴⁸ “我政府贈越種子肥料？運送分發照片”[ROC Government gift of seeds and fertilizer shipping and distribution pictures] January 27, 1973; Digital Collection Number 020-011008-0007. MFAC AHA. “我緊急支援越南農作物種子及肥料,” page 261.

⁴⁹ “我贈越肥料種子農具值一億七千萬” [ROC gifts Vietnam fertilizer, seeds, and agricultural tools worth 170 million], May 10, 1973; Digital Collection Number 020-011008-0007. MFAC AHA. “我緊急支援越南農作物種子及肥料,” page 261.

aimed at resolving both problems of basic human need and national economic prosperity.

Martyrdom and Identity: Representing Overseas Development at Home

In Taiwan, the continued demand for Taiwanese development assistance abroad was continually reported on domestic news outlets. On a regular basis from 1959 until 1975, newspaper articles delivered updates on the progress and incidents of the Taiwanese team in Vietnam. Though often short, the updates compensated for their brevity with regularity. Major Taiwanese newspapers reported on changes in team leadership, project accomplishments, and, particularly, contract renewals. These publications, which at the time were run by or closely affiliated with the GMD regime, served official state interests by reporting on the efforts of the ROC abroad to help developing nations.

The response to the 1963 death of Taiwanese rice technician Zhang Dusheng, in the introduction to this article, demonstrated the importance of overseas development to ROC foreign-policy officials. Zhang was born in 1935 and raised in Tainan, in southern Taiwan. After graduating from Tainan No. 1 High School, he enrolled in Taiwan Provincial Agricultural College in Taichung (today National Chung Hsing University 國立中興大學) for his secondary education. Upon graduation, he underwent training as a reserve officer and was assigned to grassroots political organization work. After completing his military service, he briefly taught at the Yuanlin Agricultural School (Yuanlin nongxiao 員林農校) in 1961 before moving on to work at the Taichung District Agricultural Improvement Station (Taizhong nongye gailiang chang 台中農業改良場) where he worked for two years in rice improvement. On October 10, 1963, he left Taiwan to join the Taiwanese Agricultural Technical Assistance Team to Vietnam.

Zhang was killed in the line of duty by Vietnamese communist forces on November 13, 1963. As mentioned in the introduction, he was returning to Saigon, after visiting a rice experiment station outside Saigon, when he “met a Vietnamese communist ambush and was killed” along with a Vietnamese translator.⁵⁰ Taiwanese technicians occasionally were caught in the middle of military operations—another incident involving three Taiwanese technicians being surrounded by Vietnamese communist troops occurred in Hué in 1968—but usually the technicians emerged without issue due to intervention by allied (typically American) forces or Việt Cộng recognition that Taiwanese technicians were noncombatants.⁵¹ One of my interviewees thought it likely that Zhang’s group panicked upon being ambushed by Vietnamese communists, who usually did not explicitly target Taiwanese agricultural technicians for attacks, and panicking and attempting to flee instead of surrendering and being taken prisoner resulted in the

⁵⁰ “農復會定期 追悼張篤生” [JCRR periodical mourning Zhang Dusheng]. 聯合報 [United daily news], November 20, 1963.

⁵¹ Shen Zonghan to Austin B. Sanford, April 26, 1968; Archive Number 034000000357A; Document Drafts “S,” in “Shen Zonghan Letter Drafts”; EYC AHA. Shen Zonghan to Willie Cook, April 26, 1968; Archive Number 034000000330A; Document Drafts “C,” in “Shen Zonghan Letter Drafts”; EYC AHA.

unfortunate deaths. One memorandum sent by the Taiwanese technical team to a Vietnamese agricultural official referenced “Vietcong snipers” as being responsible for Zhang’s death.⁵² Yet newspaper portrayals of the incident omitted many details, pointing instead to the patriotic nature of Zhang’s work and the work in general conducted by the Taiwanese agricultural technical teams.

Newspaper editorials, especially those from GMD-affiliated publications, *United Daily News* (*Lianhe bao* 聯合報) and *Cheng Hsin Daily News* (*Zhengxin xinwenbao* 徵信新聞報), provided venues for the GMD to use development as a means of propaganda. One *United Daily News* article cited Provincial Department of Agriculture and Forestry Director Zhang Huiqiu (張慧秋, H. T. Chang. After being interviewed following the death, Zhang Huiqiu stated that Zhang Dusheng was “exactly the type of youth that our country needs.” Elaborating further, Zhang Huiqiu explained that young technicians like Zhang Dusheng served a crucial role. Since 1953, Taiwan’s agriculture “had primarily relied on practical and relatively simple experimental research results,” but by 1963 “had already attained such high levels, that in order to further develop, it requires engaging in even more refined and profound research.” Thus, going abroad to Vietnam represented positive opportunities for experts like Zhang Dusheng, whereas work in Taiwan was often “poorly compensated,” so that they could “on the one hand accomplish our national mission of assisting our allies, and on the other hand, after accumulating savings, return home to work with peace of mind.”⁵³

Zhang Huiqiu’s goal in emphasizing aspects of pragmatism and advanced research not only reinforced that Taiwan possessed unique and useful expertise but also informed the domestic Taiwanese audience about the reasons Taiwanese youth needed to be abroad in Vietnam—to benefit both their own careers and their nation. Zhang Dusheng’s status as *benshengren* 本省人, or native Taiwanese, was never explicitly mentioned in these accounts; under an official GMD policy that treated the *benshengren* as Chinese, official accounts did not acknowledge such ethnic divisions. However, Zhang’s birthplace of Tainan was mentioned on occasion, and combined with his birth year 1935 predating the arrival of the GMD, the reader could easily deduce that Zhang was *benshengren*. Many of the blue-collar technicians who worked in rural areas in Taiwan and then were sent abroad to Vietnam and other foreign locales in the 1960s were *benshengren* like Zhang, as opposed to the bureaucrats and scientists in positions of power like Shen Zonghan and Ma Baozhi, who were *waishengren* 外省人, “mainland Chinese” who arrived in Taiwan with the GMD in 1949. Zhang’s common background

⁵² “News Releases Regarding Death of JCRR Technician by Vietcong Snipers,” Office Memorandum from Chinese Technical Mission to Vietnam on Crop Improvement to Doan Minh Quan, Chief, Rice Service, December 2, 1963; Folder 842, Bản dịch các bài báo Taiwan liên quan đến cái chết của ông Tu-Sun-Chang, thành viên phái đoàn kỹ thuật canh nông Trung Hoa Dân Quốc đến Việt Nam năm 1963 [Translation of Taiwan articles related to the death of Tusun Chang, member of the ROC agricultural technical team to Vietnam 1963], Nha Canh Nông [Directorate of Agriculture], VNA.

⁵³ “張篤生在越殉職” [The sacrifice of Zhang Dusheng], 聯合報 [United daily news], November 16, 1963.

perhaps made international development more sympathetic to *benshengren* audiences, tying in the political and diplomatic objectives of the *waishengren* GMD with the sacrifices made by *benshengren* on behalf of representing Taiwan abroad.

Most importantly, development helped legitimize the GMD state in the eyes of *benshengren*. The need for Taiwanese aid abroad and Taiwanese willingness to put their lives on the line to help other nations gave the Taiwanese a sense of nationalistic pride, demonstrating “industriousness” and “scientific knowledge,” which were deemed superior Taiwanese qualities.⁵⁴ Economic growth, humanitarian largesse, and expertise in modern science and technology were the characteristics that the GMD sought to cultivate in their public image to maintain their authoritarian grip on Taiwan.

The Overseas Chinese, International Anticommunism, and Ideologies of State-Building: Representing Taiwanese Development Globally

Although the memory of Zhang Dusheng was crafted into the image of the idealized Taiwanese under the developmentalist GMD at home, the targeted audiences were not limited to Taiwanese and the rural Vietnamese. The GMD portrayed itself as the leaders of “Free China” internationally—the legitimate Chinese regime. This image of Free China included the *huaqiao* 華僑, the overseas Chinese diaspora. For late Qing revolutionaries such as Sun Yat-sen, overseas Chinese had played an important role, from funding early GMD revolutionary efforts to providing the technical expertise for nation-building (Bergère 1998; Soon 2014). During the Cold War, the overseas Chinese became a particularly important demographic for the GMD in order to substantiate its own claims of legitimacy as the true guardians of “China.” Without the majority of its territories prior to its retreat in 1949, the GMD made careful aims to garner grassroots support in major overseas Chinese centers, such as the West Coast of North America and the Philippines, as historian Chien Wen Kung has argued, “to embed the Nationalist state into Chinese society and connect *huaqiao* to Taiwan” (Kung 2018, 5–6).

Vietnam was certainly no exception. Vietnam and greater Southeast Asia were home to a large Chinese population that had begun emigrating during the seventeenth century at the end of the Ming dynasty. Many overseas Chinese originated from southern China, particularly speakers of Cantonese, Chaozhou (Teochew), and Minnan (Hokkien). A large number settled in the southern Vietnam city of Chợ Lớn just outside Saigon and later integrated and merged into Saigon itself. ROC official diplomacy targeted these Chinese populations as part of its global efforts to build a *huaqiao* identity under ROC patronage. Historian Mei Feng Mok argues that the Chinese community in Chợ Lớn in particular developed transnational diaspora ties with Chinese outside Vietnam—in Taiwan, Malaya, and Hong Kong—partially through the connections fostered by the ROC state (Mok 2016, 89). The ROC, for example, offered

⁵⁴ “Condolence to Tusun Chang,” *Cheng Hsin Daily News*, Taipei, November 17, 1963. Translated in Folder 842, VNA.

scholarships and reserved spots for overseas Chinese as incentives for Vietnamese-Chinese to attend universities in Taiwan (Mok 2016, 92).

Chinese communities in Vietnam thus became another discursive battleground for the GMD to win over. Utilizing the same phrasing and imagery, Vietnamese newspapers serving Chinese communities in Chợ Lớn and elsewhere in Vietnam covered GMD development. One of the largest Chinese newspapers by circulation in Vietnam was *Yuen Tuong jih pao* (Ch. *Yuandong ribao* 遠東日報, Far Eastern daily), founded in 1940 by a *huaqiao* businessman of Chaozhou descent, Zhu Jixing 朱繼興, and distributed as far as Laos and Cambodia (Mok 2016, 19). *Yuen Tuong's* regular columns discussed matters of everyday life, such as education, gender, literature, and film, along with coverage of ROC actions in Vietnam. In the July 14, 1960 issue of *Yuen Tuong*, a journalist interviewed then-Crop Improvement Mission head Ma Baozhi and relayed the goals of the Taiwanese team in beginning technical assistance to Vietnam.⁵⁵ Thereafter, *Yuen Tuong* reported with regularity the actions of the Taiwanese teams, ranging from visits of irrigation experts to contract renewals.⁵⁶ In the aforementioned 1973 instance of Taiwan-gifted seeds and fertilizer, *Yuen Tuong* reported on the consequences of the gift by borrowing the same language and phrasing used in Ambassador Xu Shaochang's speech. In detailing the goals of the gift, *Yuen Tuong* noted that gifted seeds were intended "in the future not only to supply the food needs of this nation, but also to expand its crop exports."⁵⁷

The ROC portrayed the Taiwanese-Vietnamese alliance in nationalist, Asian-centric, and anticommunist terms that appealed to the anticolonial legacy of the RVN and Ngô Đình Diệm. Diệm came to power on what Miller has called "an unimpeachable reputation as a nationalist" that culminated with deposing the French-backed Bảo Đại and ended French colonial influence in Vietnam (2013, 28). Though fiercely anticolonial, Diệm also gained U.S. support for his regime through his vehement anticommunism, particularly against Hồ Chí Minh's Democratic Republic of Vietnam. As historian Nu-Anh Tran has argued, the RVN engaged in an anticommunist internationalism imagining the RVN in friendships with Cold War allies and as a member of the "Free World" (Tran 2013, 92). This anticommunist internationalism included participation in the Asian People's Anti-Communist League, of which the ROC was a founding member, along with delegations from South Korea, Thailand, Macau, Hong Kong, the Ryukyu Islands (Okinawa), the Philippines, and the RVN.⁵⁸ RVN anticommunists "conceived of

⁵⁵ "農技團長馬保之對記者談該團此行任務" [Interview with agricultural technical team lead Ma Baozhi discussing recent agricultural technical team mission], July 14, 1960; "駐越農技團 (I)" [Agricultural technical team in Vietnam, vol. 1]; Archival Collection Number 020000030452A; MFAC AHA.

⁵⁶ "農技團長馬保之對記者談該團此行任務," July 14, 1960.

⁵⁷ "我贈越肥料種子農具值一億七千萬," May 10, 1973. "我緊急支援越南農作物種子及肥料," page 261.

⁵⁸ "Asian Peoples' Anti-Communist Conference, Minutes of the Opening Session," June 15, 1954; History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, B-387-039, Documents Related to the Asian

anticommunist internationalism as the natural response to communist imperialism”; as a result, the RVN regime emphasized its international relationships (Tran 2013, 92).

A 1960 document from the RVN Ministry of Public Works and Transportation, most likely a Vietnamese translation of an ROC official report of Diệm’s visit to Taiwan, likened the two nations as being “two peoples [or nations, *dân-tộc*] that share the same cultural root which communism is destroying now.”⁵⁹ It elaborated on the existential threat of communism to both nations: “the existence of two countries is also currently in danger.” The report praised the accomplishments of the GMD’s 1911 revolution that led to the establishment of the ROC and Diệm’s founding of the RVN.⁶⁰ The struggles of the “free” peoples of Asia became a point of pride and of common history. Both sides perceived themselves to be linked with a recent revolutionary past, rooted in their violent opposition to communism.

Furthermore, the ROC report favorably compared the nationalist ideologies espoused by both leaders, the Three Principles of the People (*sanminzhuyi* 三民主義) — which originated with Sun Yat-sen and was adopted by Chiang Kai-shek as the political ideology of the ROC—and Ngô Đình Diệm’s Personalism (*Nhân vị*).⁶¹

Both Personalism and the Three Principles shared basic tenets. Personalism was Diệm’s answer to finding a path between radical communism and French colonial-defined liberalism. It can be traced back to the writings of French Catholic philosopher Emmanuel Mounier, who critiqued liberal capitalism and individualism in the wake of the Great Depression of the 1930s while also rejecting Marxism and its tendency toward oppression of individuals (Miller 2013, 46; Stewart 2017, 95). Diệm’s brother Ngô Đình Nhu, who played a crucial advisory and political role in the Diệm regime, became exposed to Personalism while studying in France as an archivist. Eventually Personalism, as argued by historian Jessica Chapman, became the “official state philosophy” of the RVN under Diệm (Chapman 2013, 71). Phi-Vân Nguyen and other historians have shown that the RVN constitution of 1956 reflected Personalist principles (Tan 2019; Nguyen 2018).

Yet, Personalism as articulated by Ngô Đình Nhu and adopted in the RVN context, was also, in Miller’s words, “maddeningly opaque” (Miller 2013, 46). This opacity was due in part to its roles as an indigenous ideology and a platform for postcolonial consolidation. As historian Geoffrey Stewart has put it, the Ngôs needed an “authentic Vietnamese ‘cultural formula’ to imbue the population with the appropriate sense of national spirit to willingly participate in the nation-building process” (Stewart 2017, 99).

Anti-Communist League Conference, Papers Related to Treaty-Making and International Conferences; Syngman Rhee Institute, Yonsei University.

<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118328>.

⁵⁹ Hồ sơ về việc Tổng Thống Việt Nam viếng thăm Đài Loan năm 1960 [Summary of RVN president’s visit to Taiwan 1960], Undated (1960); Folder 1161, Bộ Công Chánh và Giao Thông [Ministry of Public Works and Transportation]; VNA.

⁶⁰ Hồ sơ về việc Tổng Thống Việt Nam viếng thăm Đài Loan năm 1960, Undated (1960).

⁶¹ Hồ sơ về việc Tổng Thống Việt Nam viếng thăm Đài Loan năm 1960, Undated (1960).

Personalism was this formula. In imagining the ideal Vietnamese village, the Ngô's believed that the conservatism and spiritualism of Personalism were needed to enact the social ties between community and the modern Vietnamese nation (Stewart 2017, 100). Through his examination of the resettlement of northern refugees into southern Vietnam, historian Jason Picard has argued that the Ngô's saw in traditional northern villages their ideal of "a corporate, close-knit community" that needed to be replicated across rural Vietnam (Picard 2016, 84–86). Personalism tied into this vision; hence, the emphasis on the rural village.

Like Personalism, Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles as an ideology provided justification for a revolutionary regime without being too dogmatically onerous. Beginning in 1905, Sun had elaborated publicly on the Three Principles—*minsheng zhuyi* 民生主義, usually translated as "livelihood of the people" or less often as "welfare"; *minquan zhuyi* 民權主義, usually translated as "democracy"; and *minzu zhuyi* 民族主義, usually translated as "nationalism"—as an organizing concept for his revolutionary platform, culminating in the 1924 published eponymous work. Sun was a pragmatist, and the Three Principles served as a malleable political tool to allow Sun and the ROC to garner popular political support in an anti-Manchu and anti-imperial sentiment in early twentieth-century China. According to Sun Yat-sen biographer Marie-Claire Bergère, the Three Principles were "a work of propaganda, a long political tract designed to win followers rather than to instill conviction, an appeal to action rather than to thought" aimed to "diffuse a number of ideas rather than to analyze them" (Bergère 1998, 353). Continuing under Chiang Kai-shek's ROC, the Three Principles were largely used as a symbolic platform to demonstrate the ROC's welfarist or revolutionary roots when convenient. Integrated into curricula across schools and military academies, for example, the Three Principles were meant to build loyalty to and support for the authoritarian ROC regime.

Though Personalism and the Three Principles were both often deployed for propaganda purposes, the consequences of that deployment often resulted in real and expansive networks, movements, and institutions—such as the Asian People's Anti-Communist League and Moral Re-Armament—that affected perceptions and foreign policies. As historian Mitchell Tan has effectively argued, "the production and proliferation of a national ideology was an important way in which nascent Asian nation-states like the RVN sought to define themselves not just to their people but also in relationship to a Region divided, at least in part, by a conflict of ideas" (Tan 2019, 4). The definition and legitimation of the GMD regime were unquestionably the highest priorities. The Three Principles was not only deployed as a political or social ideology, but also as a developmentalist one as well. Economic welfare, providing for the well-being of the Taiwanese and global peoples like the Vietnamese against communism, became crucial.

Alluding to common political ideologies and revolutionary origins was inherent to Taiwan's imagining of its development missions to Vietnam and the rest of the Global South. Taiwan's missions to Africa and land-reform training of Third World bureaucrats

also reflected how the GMD became adroit at using the language and discourse of decolonizing nations to demonstrate solidarity and commonality. In Vietnam, the ROC seized upon Personalism, the founding of the RVN, and the background of Diệm and his family to enable the representation that it found most ideal, one centered on Taiwan's revolutionary and technical modernity and steadfast anticommunist solidarity.

Conclusion

The Vietnam mission proved to be, at least in terms of continued demand from the RVN, a success for the Taiwanese. The original six-month mission was extended to three years. In 1961, the JCRR attempted to reassign the leader of the farmers' association team, Yang Yukun (楊玉昆, Y. K. Yang), to Taiwan, where farmers' associations needed his attention. But Yang's reassignment out of Vietnam resulted in a deeply impassioned plea from Trần Ngọc Liên to the JCRR's chairman at the time, Jiang Menglin 蔣夢麟:

The establishment of numerous Strategic Hamlets has greatly improved security conditions in the rural areas and will afford greater opportunities to more effectively expand the services of our [farmers' associations]. This situation intensifies the urgent need of the specialists who have become familiar with our conditions. ... Mr. Chairman, I must earnestly request that you reconsider your three-year service policy in the light of the present situation in Vietnam. We are deeply engaged in an active war, and our resources are stretched to the maximum. The focus of this war is in the countryside and among the rural people. Experienced direction and leadership is of special importance at this time.⁶²

With the implementation of the Strategic Hamlet program that sought "pacification" of rural villages by increasing support and thus ostensibly lessening rural ties with communist insurgents, the RVN sought Taiwanese expertise in rural organization. By 1970, the United States had contributed US\$2,036,088 to the Taiwan missions, paying for capital costs involved in technical assistance.⁶³ In a 1972 evaluation of the contract with the ROC, Ralph Gleason, USAID Deputy Associate Director for Food

⁶² Letter from Trần Ngọc Liên to Jiang Menglin, December 6, 1962; "駐越農技團 (II)" [Agricultural technical team in Vietnam, vol. 2]; Archival Collection Number 020000030453; pages 17–18; MFAC AHA.

⁶³ Contract Evaluation, May 3, 1972; Folder 3832; Hồ sơ kiểm soát ngân khoản hợp đồng với phái bộ hợp tác tái thiết nông thôn- Trung Quốc về yểm trợ tổng quát canh nông cho Việt Nam năm 1969–1973 [Documents pertaining to budgeting and audits of contracts with the Joint Commission for Rural Reconstruction regarding general support for agriculture in Vietnam in 1969–1973], Cơ quan phát triển quốc tế Hoa Kỳ [U.S. Agency for International Development]; VNA.

and Agriculture in Vietnam, described the Taiwanese mission as attaining mission goals “in a very practical manner...for instance, demonstration fields were elaborately set up and operated by the contractor as an intermediate goal towards attainment of the final goal of widespread extension of improved varieties and cultural practices.” As a result, “farmers benefiting from CATG assistance have experienced substantial increases in income through increased harvests of crop produce of high value.” However, Gleason cast doubt on the ability of the RVN to fulfill its end of the agreement, stating that “final goal of nation-wide extension rests in the capacity and competence of the cooperating country,” and then ended by lamenting that “more could have been accomplished if host country support were more adequate.” In a matter of a few years, Gleason was proved correct.⁶⁴ Despite the “intermediate” success of the Taiwanese technical mission in realizing higher incomes and a system of extension and demonstration, these efforts were ultimately unable to save the RVN regime. Taiwanese missions were continually renewed until the demise of the RVN in 1975 concluded Taiwanese missions to Vietnam.

Taiwanese development missions to Vietnam began a decades-long project to portray Taiwan as leading a vanguard of the developing world. After having achieved success in agricultural science, farmers’ associations, and rural improvement in Taiwan, GMD planners sent Taiwanese scientists and technicians abroad to develop other nations. Taiwanese missions deployed specific practices of modern high-yielding seeds and chemical fertilizers to reproduce Taiwanese success. At the same time, the GMD also emphasized Taiwan’s rural modernity as accomplished through a history of success in farmers’ associations. In representations of Taiwanese development through newspaper articles, propaganda, and official reports, Taiwanese planners portrayed Taiwan as a primarily rural society that succeeded through achieving modern science (of developing high-yielding seeds), ingenuity (through agricultural machinery), and hard work (of farmers and technicians). This imaginary of Taiwanese modernity marked a larger shift within the GMD technocracy and the ROC state itself, which saw Taiwan’s development success deployed for diplomatic objectives as well as strengthening its domestic rule. Not only did the ROC demonstrate its anticommunist conviction to a “Free World” ally, the RVN, but it also burnished its developmentalist credentials at home and diverted attention away from its repressive authoritarianism. As shown in the official speeches and writings about Zhang Dusheng, the GMD imagined a modern and humanitarian ROC that sacrificed its youth to save other nations. This imagination undergirded the emergence of a developmentalist platform that continued to define Taiwan for decades to come.

⁶⁴ Auditing Report of JCRR, November 14, 1970; Folder 3832, VNA.

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About the Author

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