

Introduction

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THE PROSPECTS FOR PEACE AND STABILITY in Southeast Asia look better today than at any time since the end of World War II. Unparalleled events at the beginning of the 1990s — from the collapse of the Berlin Wall, to the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the eventual pullout of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia — turned a historic page on Indochina.

Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos seem ready to join the world community as they move towards an era of peace and development after nearly half a century of war and isolation. These countries are undergoing a period of transition as a result of the national reconciliation efforts taking place in Cambodia and the ongoing campaign for economic reform in Vietnam. The rapid economic growth in recent years of some members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) opens up new areas for economic cooperation between Indochina and ASEAN, a development which will be crucial to stability and peace in Southeast Asia.

At the UP Asian Center, a growing interest in the dynamism of the Indochinese region after the signing of the Cambodian Peace Treaty, encouraged some academics to hold the first conference on Indochina on 1-2 September 1993. The papers presented in this collection were first read during this conference. The Asian Center decided to publish the conference proceedings with the hope of generating greater awareness on Indochina and the impact of these emerging states on regional affairs. Unfortunately, while we would have wanted to include a discussion of the reforms now taking place in Laos, no one was able to submit a paper regarding the topic. Perhaps this is an indication that we have yet to know much more of this country.

The ethnic, cultural and political identities in Indochina form the backdrop of the first three papers in this collection.

Prof. Aurora Roxas-Lim takes a second look at the evolution of Khmer civilization. She examines how local socio-cultural transformations and belief systems merged with external influences from India and China to provide the foundations of one of the greater civilizations of Asia. She also discusses the continuing sources of tension in Cambodia and analyzes their implications for the future of this nation.

The life and times of Nguyen Khac Vien, a Vietnamese intellectual and revolutionary, whose unorthodox views have provoked varied reactions from the Communist Party of Vietnam and Marxist ideologues in Europe, is the subject of Dr. Armando Malay Jr.'s equally interesting presentation. He examines how Vien's thinking has changed over time and reflects on its significance in view of the decline of socialism.

Finally, Prof. M. Ragos Espinas shares some insights on the processes that led to a political settlement of the conflict in Cambodia. She delves into the problems faced by the UN body tasked to implement the terms of the Cambodian Peace Treaty and explores the possible future of this war-torn country in light of the results of the UN-sponsored elections in May 1993.

The second set of papers inquires more deeply into the processes of nation building in contemporary Vietnam and Cambodia.

Mr. Le Tien Ba talks about the specific policies which have been adopted in line with the ongoing process of economic renovation or *doi moi* in Vietnam. He clarifies the bases of these reforms by looking back at some of the major shortcomings of Vietnam's development strategies, pursued since its reunification in 1976. He stresses the modest but positive gains achieved so far by these reforms, and outlines some of the challenges facing Vietnam in the years ahead.

How have the reconstruction efforts of Cambodia fared since the signing of the Peace Treaty? This is the focus of Dr. Richard W.A. Vokes' presentation where he examines some indicators of an improving economy and identifies certain factors that may help in the reconstruction of Cambodia. He emphasizes, however, that much of the success of these efforts will depend on political stability, the inflow of external assistance and the willingness of the contending factions in the coalition government to work together.

Finally, Hon. Jose Zaide Jr. shares his reflections on the important role played by ASEAN in bringing the warring factions to the negotiating table and forging a political settlement in Cambodia. He also underscores the continuing commitment of ASEAN to support Cambodia on the road to reconstruction and development.

The difficult task of organizing and preparing for the first conference on Indochina was made easier by the support of Dr. Artemio Palongpalong, then Dean of the Asian Center, the cooperation of colleagues and administrative staff of the Asian Center, particularly Lilia Marquez, Elvie Fortin, Medy Cortado, Nellie Reyes and Cena Flores, and the enthusiastic participation of many individuals, academics and institutions.

While it is not possible to list down everyone who helped make the conference possible, I sincerely appreciate the assistance and cooperation of my students in Asian Studies 251-G (Cambodia) who

prepared the Indochina exhibits and comprised the secretariat during the conference. Many thanks to Erlinda de Guzman, Christian Mundo, Glynis Ledesma and Rommel Curaming for their indefatigable efforts to make the conference worth remembering.

My deepest appreciation also to Carlota Vizmanos Cortez and Maria Teresa Melgar who helped edit and put together this collection of papers. Their keen eye for detail, their brilliance, creativity and energetic spirits made this publication a reality.

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