WATER FIRST
A Political History of Hydraulics in Vietnam’s Red River Delta

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CANDIDATE'S STATEMENT

Except where otherwise indicated this thesis is my own work

[Signature]

S. Andrew Enticknap Smith

November 2002
Nhất nước, nhị phân, tam can, tư giống
First water, second fertiliser, third labour, fourth seeds

-- Vietnamese proverb
to Meg,

my partner in the adventure
Acknowledgements

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Canberra
April, 2002
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Hydraulic brigades and the production-construction dichotomy

The Trịnh Xá hydraulic worksite
Abstract

Between 1961 and 1976 Hải Hùng province -- present day Hải Dương and Hùng Yên -- lost the equivalent of two entire districts of agricultural land. How could so much land be abandoned under a collectivised agriculture system? And what role did poor water control infrastructure play in creating such a situation?

I answer these questions by examining the historical patterns of hydraulic development in northern Vietnam from the beginning of the 19th century until the introduction of the Production Contract system in 1981. Underlying both the French colonial and communist visions of modernity and economic development was a belief that improving agricultural productivity, of which large-scale hydraulic infrastructure was an important component, could catalyse growth in the rural economy, which could then finance industrialisation. I argue throughout this thesis that developing large-scale hydraulic infrastructure in the Red River delta has relied upon the creation of a hydraulic bargain between the state and water users. This is in contrast to Wittfogel’s theory of the hydraulic state, insofar as developing hydraulic infrastructure has depended upon the active political and economic participation and support of water users, and not the absolute power of the state. The political economic history of the hydraulic bargain highlights the relative power of peasants to influence the direction of large-scale hydraulic development and, as such, the shape of the Red River delta’s wet-rice economy.
**List of abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BEFEO</td>
<td>Bulletin de l'Ecole Française de l'Extrême Orient</td>
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<tr>
<td>BEI</td>
<td>Bulletin Economique de l'Indochine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BHH</td>
<td>The Bác-Hưng-Hải large-scale irrigation and drainage project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BNTQD</td>
<td>Bộ Nông trướng Quốc doanh [Ministry for State Farms]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTL</td>
<td>Bộ Thủy lợi [Ministry of Hydraulics]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAEV</td>
<td>Centre for Agricultural Extension Volunteers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCA</td>
<td>Canadian Co-operative Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIDA</td>
<td>Canadian International Development Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>DRV</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of Vietnam (1954-76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FYP</td>
<td>Five-Year Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GGI</td>
<td>Gouvernement Général de l'Indochine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCLS</td>
<td>Nghiên Cứu Lịch Sử [Journal of Historical Research]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NTL</td>
<td>Nha Thủy lợi [Bureau for Hydraulics]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QH</td>
<td>Quốc Hội [National Assembly]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSA</td>
<td>Résident Supérieur de l'Annam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RST</td>
<td>Résident Supérieur du Tonkin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRV</td>
<td>Socialist Republic of Vietnam (1976 - )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TT</td>
<td>Tâm Thời (Used to indicate archival material that is held for a limited period)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCP</td>
<td>Vietnam Communist Party [Đảng Cộng Sản Việt Nam] (1976 - )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VV</td>
<td>Vĩnh Viễn (Used to indicate archival material that is kept indefinitely)</td>
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<tr>
<td>VWP</td>
<td>Vietnam Workers’ Party [Đảng Lao Động Việt Nam] (1945-76)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vietnamese Terms</td>
<td>English Translation</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ban Công tác Nông thôn Trung ương</td>
<td>Central Committee for Countryside Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bộ Lao động</td>
<td>Ministry of Labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bộ Thủy lợi</td>
<td>Ministry of Hydraulics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bộ Kinh tế</td>
<td>Ministry of Economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bộ Nông nghiệp</td>
<td>Ministry of Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Đảng Công Sản Việt Nam</td>
<td>Vietnam Communist Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liên đoàn lao động tỉnh Hải Dương</td>
<td>Hải Dương province Trade Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niên giám Thống kê</td>
<td>Statistical Annual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tạp Chí Thủy Lợi</td>
<td>Journal of Hydraulics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thủ tướng Chính phủ</td>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tố công tác chuyên gia lúa</td>
<td>Hải Dương province rice expert team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tổng cục Thống kê</td>
<td>General Department of Statistics</td>
</tr>
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<td>Viện Kinh tế</td>
<td>Institute for Economics</td>
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Source: (Pouyanne, 1931, Plate 1).

A. Central delta
B. Southwest delta
C. Northern delta
D. Maritime zone