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Demographic and Social Change in Vietnam

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The end of the Vietnam War in 1975 sparked Western interest in aiding in the reconstruction of Vietnam, but this came to an abrupt halt in the late 1970s when Vietnamese troops moved into Cambodia. Following the government's renewed commitment to economic reform (doi moi) in 1986, and the withdrawal of its troops from Cambodia during 1989, Vietnam is once again opening up to the Western world. However, information on social and economic conditions in contemporary Vietnam is scarce.

With a total population of 64.4 million on the 1st of April 1989, Vietnam is the second largest country in Southeast Asia. Two complementary papers commenting on recent demographic and social change in Vietnam are included in this Briefing Paper. They draw on the first results of the Five Percent Sample from the 1989 Population Census, released in March this year, to profile key aspects of recent social change.

Terry Hull summarises the principal trends in fertility, marriage and mortality, while Dean Forbes looks at the pattern of urbanisation and urban growth, and the emerging spatial structure of the country.

The authors

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The 1989 National Population Census
First results on fertility, marriage, and mortality

Terence H. Hull

Vietnam carried out a census in 1979, but the results were not distributed widely, and the tabulated materials did not include some standard information required on a modern census, such as marriage and fertility data and information related to clear definitions of place of residence and patterns of recent migration. As a result, the 1979 enumeration was relatively little utilised for demographic analysis.

To correct these difficulties the Government of Vietnam, with assistance from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics, designed the 1989 Census to give a full and accurate picture of demographic trends in the nation. The enumeration was conducted in three parts. First a full enumeration was undertaken of all persons considered to be usually resident in the country as at midnight on 31 March/1 April. A six month cut-off was used to define the concept of 'usual' residence. The questions asked in the full enumeration included:

1. Name
2. Relationship to head of household
3. Sex
4. Date of birth
5. Ethnic group
6. Internal migration
7. Literacy
8. Education
9. Qualifications
10. Marital status
11. Usual activity
12. Occupation
13. Industry

The second part was a sample census of five percent of the total population which used the same questions as the full enumeration, but added questions for women of child-bearing age:

14. Children ever born
15. Children still living
16. Date of last birth
17. Deaths since Tet holiday, 1988

These questions are used to estimate levels of fertility and mortality. Additionally, some questions on housing were asked of people in the five percent sample. This sample enumeration covered approximately 3 million people out of the total resident population of 63.4 million.

The third part of the Census was the collection of data on all members of the so-called Special Enumeration Group, which included members of the military, diplomatic corps and workers sent

overseas on arrangements with the Ministry of Labour. This group was asked the same questions as those on the full enumeration. There were just over 1 million people in the Special Enumeration Group, making the overall total population of Vietnam 64.4 million.

Nature of the Preliminary Results

The first Census results were published in March, 1990, in a report of 74 pages with appendices containing 15 tables and Vietnamese and English versions of the questionnaire. Titled 'Sample Results', the information covers the full questionnaire results from the five percent sample households and, for the national tables, the returns from the Special Enumeration Group. The authors warn that the sample results are still subject to some adjustments to ensure that the returns from each province contribute the correct weight to the national results, ie. the General Statistics Office (GSO) needs to check the results against the original sample frame to ensure that the findings are indeed representative. Nonetheless, the tables are unlikely to be adjusted significantly, and for most variables the final reports will be based on the full enumeration, which is currently being processed.

The tables in the preliminary report provide sufficient data to make indirect estimates of fertility and mortality levels and trends, and to analyse the first available national data on patterns of marriage in Vietnam. The remainder of this *Briefing Paper* will review these findings.

Trends in fertility: evidence of substantial decline

Indirect estimates of total fertility rates derived from the 1979 and 1989 Censuses are presented in Table 1. They are called indirect because they are not based on registration statistics, or even directly on questions about the number and timing of births, but rather are calculated from reports of the ratio of children to women of child bearing age, or the date of the last birth to women. The trends implied by these calculations are reasonable, with an apparent even decline in fertility from an average of six to four children per woman between the early 1970s and the time of the Census in 1989. This is also the period of the development of the family planning program.

Confirmation of this result can be found in the analysis of the 1988 Demographic Survey of Vietnam, reported by Nhan and Hanenberg (1989, 5). According to this nationally representative survey, the total fertility rate for the nation fell from 4.6 in 1977 to 3.7 in 1987. Because of the methodology used in that survey the authors caution against putting too much faith in the results of single years, but contend that the 'total fertility rate was *at least* 4.1 in 1985-1987' which is quite in line with the Census estimate of 4.2 for 1985-89.

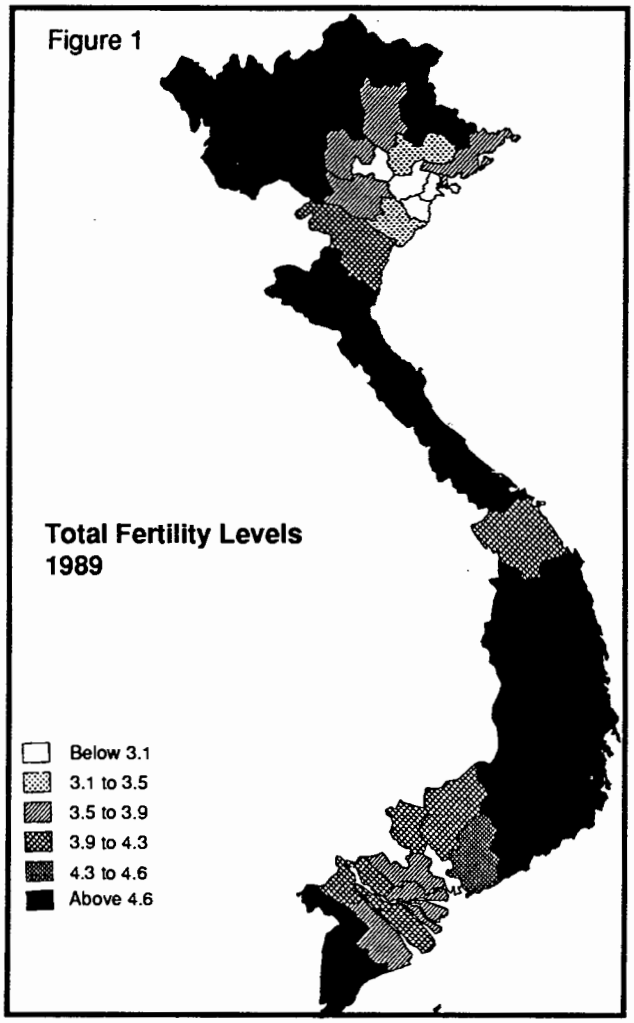
Table 1. Estimated Total Fertility Rates. Vietnam, 1960s-1989.

Reference Period for Estimate	Rate	Method
Results from 1979 Population Census		
Total 1970-74	6.03	Rele[1]
Total 1975-79	4.85	Rele
Results from 1989 Population Census		
Total 1980-84	4.69	Rele
Urban 1980-84	3.42	Rele
Rural 1980-84	5.13	Rele
Total 1985-89	4.22	Rele
Urban 1985-89	2.80	Rele
Rural 1985-89	4.63	Rele
Total 1988-89	3.93	P/F[2]
Urban 1988-89	2.51	P/F
Rural 1988-89	4.39	P/F

Note: Calculations made using the Easwespop Fertility Estimate Program of the East-West Population Institute.
Sources:
1. *Rele* Child Woman Ratio Method calculated from the age-sex structures reported in the 1979 and1989 Census reports.
2. *Parity/Fertility (P/F)* Pattern Method calculated from data on children ever born, and children born in the last year reported in the 1989 Census report.

The sample results do not provide any provincial level data which can be used to calculate regional variations of fertility, but a map is presented which shows the total fertility levels of each province. This is reproduced as Figure 1. Here it can be seen that the areas with lowest fertility are the densely populated delta regions around Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. The rest of the country has fertility at least 20 percent higher than the national average. As the final census results become available it will be possible to calculate fertility levels in a variety of ways for each province, and thus obtain a better picture of the impact of social changes and the family planning program across the country.

Figure 1



Source: Based on data in Census Steering Committee, 1990

The first national statistics on marital status

For many years analysis of demographic and social trends in Vietnam has been hampered by lack of information on marriage patterns. This information is useful not only in monitoring factors responsible for fertility levels; it also reflects changes in the roles of women in the society, and trends in household formation and dissolution. The marital status data provided in the 1989 Census will be a very useful addition to the analytical tools of economists and sociologists.

Comparison of marriage patterns of Vietnam with those of Indonesia (see Table 2) reveals a somewhat higher singulate mean age at marriage (SMAM), and relatively lower rates of divorce and widowhood in Vietnam than in her more populous ASEAN neighbour. In a partial analysis of marriage data from the 1988 Demographic Survey, Nhan and Hanenberg found a SMAM of 22.4 in the north and 24.6 in the south, which is perfectly in line with the Census results. They contended that the higher age at marriage of southern women was because of a dearth of males due to the war, but confirmation of this hypothesis will have to await the publication of full data on age structure by region, and more detail on the prevalence of widowhood and divorce. For the time being, it is worth noting that the proportion of women who are widowed is actually lower in Vietnam than it is in Indonesia. This may be caused by a faster rate of remarriage in Vietnam.

Levels of infant and child mortality

Data on mortality are notoriously difficult to collect, and in most developing countries analysts are forced to use methods of estimation which rely heavily on assumptions which may not be valid for the particular country under investigation. Added to this is the problem of deriving reasonable estimates from small samples. It is little wonder demographers despair when

confronted with questions about current levels and trend of mortality.

Nonetheless mortality measures are important because they do tend to reflect the welfare of the society and, in particular, progress in the provision of adequate nutrition and health care. The trick is in knowing whether apparent changes in the measures are real or merely products of the method of measurement.

The 1989 Census data, when processed using the United Nations Population Division's program *Mortpak Lite*, yields an estimate of infant mortality of 44 deaths to children under one year of age for every 1,000 live births (see Table 3). By comparison the 1988 Demographic Survey produced an estimate of 37 deaths per 1,000 live births for the period 1984-86. The latter estimate is based on a much smaller sample, and on a different method of estimation, and was regarded as suspect by the authors (Nhan and Hanenberg, 1989, 4-5). The Census now suggests that previous claims of infant mortality rates under 40/1,000 were perhaps premature. Nonetheless, the mortality levels of Vietnam are lower than those of many other Asian countries, including the more advanced nations of Indonesia and the Philippines, and suggest that the national primary health care program described in Worth (1984), Vu Can (1984) and the pamphlet on Public Health in Vietnam (1965) may indeed have been effective in reducing mortality in a very poor country.

In line with the relatively low infant mortality rates, Vietnam has low child mortality and an expectation of life at birth of over 60 years. Estimates for regions and provinces will be produced following the publication of later Census results.

Table 2. Trends in the Marital Status Indexes* of Women in Indonesia, 1971-1985 and Vietnam, 1988-89

Marital Status Index	Year of Estimate			
	1971	1980	1985	1987
Indonesia				
SMAM	19.28	20.03	21.1	
Is (Single)	.157	.205	.241	.259
Im (Currently Married)	.739	.723	.701	.694
Iw (Widowed)	.058	.062	.021	.018
Id (Divorced)	.046	.046	.038	.030
	1988	1989		
Vietnam				
SMAM		23.22		
Is (Single)	.342	.334		
Im (Currently Married)	.634	.628		
Iw (Widowed)	.015	.020		
Id (Divorced)	.009	.010		
Ip (Separated)	.021	.009		

Notes: * Weighted according to the Hutterite Natural Fertility Pattern, thus giving greatest emphasis to the

Table 3. Infant and Child Mortality Rates.

Region	Infant Mortality (a)	Child Mortality (b)	Expectation of Life at Birth
Total	44	13	63.3
Urban	31	7	68.1
Rural	47	15	62.5

Notes: (a) Deaths under age 1 per 1000 live births.
(b) Deaths age 1-5 per 1000 survivors to age 1.

Source: Calculated from 1989 Census Preliminary Report

Conclusion

The Vietnam Population Census of 1989 represents a major contribution to our understanding of social and demographic change in the second largest country of Southeast Asia. The Census refects some of the legacies of war and extended economic disruption, but it also indicates that government policies to reduce fertility and mortality are showing signs of success. The preliminary results are enough to whet the appetite and cause analysts to await future publications with a heightened sense of anticipation.

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Recent Aspects of Urbanisation in Vietnam

Dean Forbes

Vietnam has experienced much slower rates of urbanisation and urban growth than its Southeast Asian neighbours. During the 1960s and 1970s this was due to the protracted period of warfare and fears for national security. Since re-unification in 1976 the process has been reinforced by government strategy. Policies aimed at containing the growth of the larger cities, concentrating greater efforts on the secondary and smaller district cities, and fostering the development of New Economic Zones have kept down the levels of urbanisation in Vietnam.

Vietnam's towns and cities at re-unification were in poor condition. The larger cities in the north experienced bomb damage, had been periodically evacuated, and starved of investment when government funds and material resources were diverted to the war. Southern cities such as Da Nang and Ho Chi Minh City grew large and unwieldy from the influx of people fleeing the fighting in the rural areas. The new government reacted strongly against what it perceived as the excessive and unproductive growth of these sprawling 'neo-colonial' cities. It developed policies to convert them from 'consumer' to 'producer' cities, repatriating the surplus populations of the largest southern cities, and devising and implementing policies to curb future urban growth (Forbes and Thrift, 1987).

Vietnam introduced a program of economic reforms in the late 1970s, and after stop-start progress affirmed and strengthened it at the 6th Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam in 1986. Measures range from the introduction of contract production in agriculture, through changes to the structure of government and the increased use of market prices, to the proclamation of a liberal foreign investment code (de Vylder and Fforde, 1988). Although Vietnam is still largely isolated from the West, since the withdrawal of troops from Cambodia pressure is mounting for a resumption of economic relations. A stream of business persons through Vietnam is evidence of strong private sector anticipation of increased economic links. It is against this background that we need to look at the kinds of changes occurring within the urban system.

The Pattern of Urbanisation

The release of preliminary figures from the 1989 Census show how successful policies for containing urban growth have been. Vietnam's urban population is defined as people living within declared cities and provincial towns, and district towns with populations over 2,000. In 1979 the total urban population numbered 10 million, or 19.2 percent of the total population. By 1989 this had increased to 12.7 million, but it still only amounted to 19.8 percent of the total. This is extraordinarily low compared to Vietnam's Southeast Asian neighbours, where the urban areas typically contain closer to 30 percent of the total population.

From 1979 to 1989 the urban population grew at 2.3 percent per annum compared to an overall population growth rate of 2.1 percent (Table 1). Moreover, the available evidence suggests that the rate of urbanisation began to escalate in the last few years, as the government relaxed its tight restrictions on issuing residential permits for the largest urban areas. Whereas in the first half of the decade urban growth rates were negative or very low, since the early 1980s they have picked up, reaching 2.9 percent per annum between 1985 and 1989. This poses a dilemma for urban planners who appreciate the need for more freedom of movement between urban and rural areas, and from city to city, but fear the consequences of a rush of people to the largest centres.

The spatial distribution of population growth in the inter-censal period between 1979 and 1989 is shown in Figure 2. In general population growth rates have remained high in the Red River

and Mekong River deltas, though the highland areas in the north and south-central Vietnam also have high rates of growth. To understand the geographic pattern of urban population growth we need to look more closely at tabular information.

Urban primacy indexes, which measure the growth of the largest cities compared to the total urban population, suggest Vietnam's strategy of containing the growth of the largest cities remains effective. Both the two-city and four-city ratios declined between 1979 and 1989, though it seems most of this reduction occurred early in the decade, with both ratios increasing slightly between 1985 and 1989 (Table 2). Vietnam's planners would prefer to see the secondary cities and smaller towns grow faster than the largest cities. Between 1979 and 1989 they grew at 2.7 percent per annum, compared to 1.9 percent per annum in the four largest cities: Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, Da Nang and Haiphong (see Figure 3).

Table 1. Urban and Rural Population Growth Rates, 1976-1989

	Total population (% pa)	Urban population (% pa)	Rural population (% pa)
1976-1979	2.19	-0.11	2.77
1979-1982	2.30	0.88	2.64
1982-1985	2.15	3.11	1.93
1985-1989	1.84	2.90	1.07
1979-1989	2.13	2.33	1.80

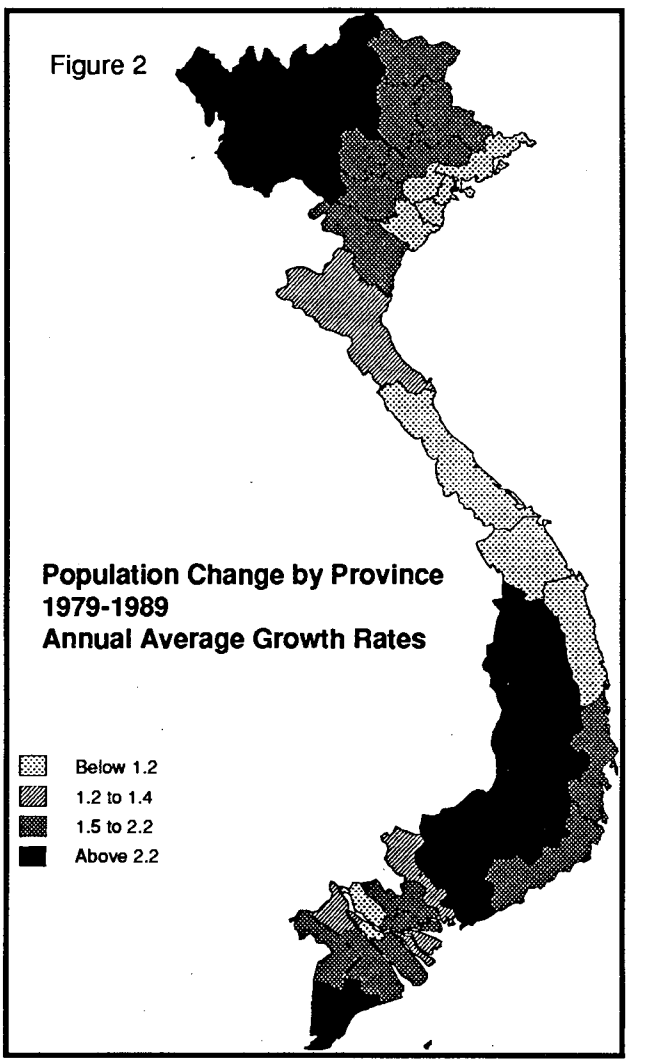
Source: Calculated from data in Central Census Steering Committee (1990, 15).

Hanoi

Hanoi had an urban population of 1.1 million in 1989, with the hinterland coming under the city's administration adding another 2.0 million rural dwellers. The large rural hinterland incorporated into the city reflects the importance once given to 'self-sufficient' cities (Thrift and Forbes, 1986). However, planners increasingly find the servicing of the urban population a sufficient challenge, and have therefore made moves to have the bulk of the rural areas given back to surrounding provinces. Like Chinese cities, Vietnam's larger urban areas contain a 'floating' population of illegal city residents. Planners estimate there are some 70,000-80,000 in Hanoi.

The strategy of economic renovation has created demand by both national and joint venture enterprises for urban land. As a result, Hanoi's economy is booming and a large amount of new construction is underway. Yet many new structures use doubtful construction techniques and are of minimal architectural merit. The dilapidated infrastructure within the city suggests a need for new investment, but it would be most unfortunate if the urban architectural heritage of the city is destroyed or diminished in any way. Hanoi contains

Figure 2



Source: Based on data in Census Steering Committee, 1990

numerous structurally sound French colonial buildings, as well as a large area of original 'old Hanoi'. A UNESCO study earlier this year recommended serious attention be given to the preservation of the architectural heritage of Hanoi, but no funding has yet been provided for the project.

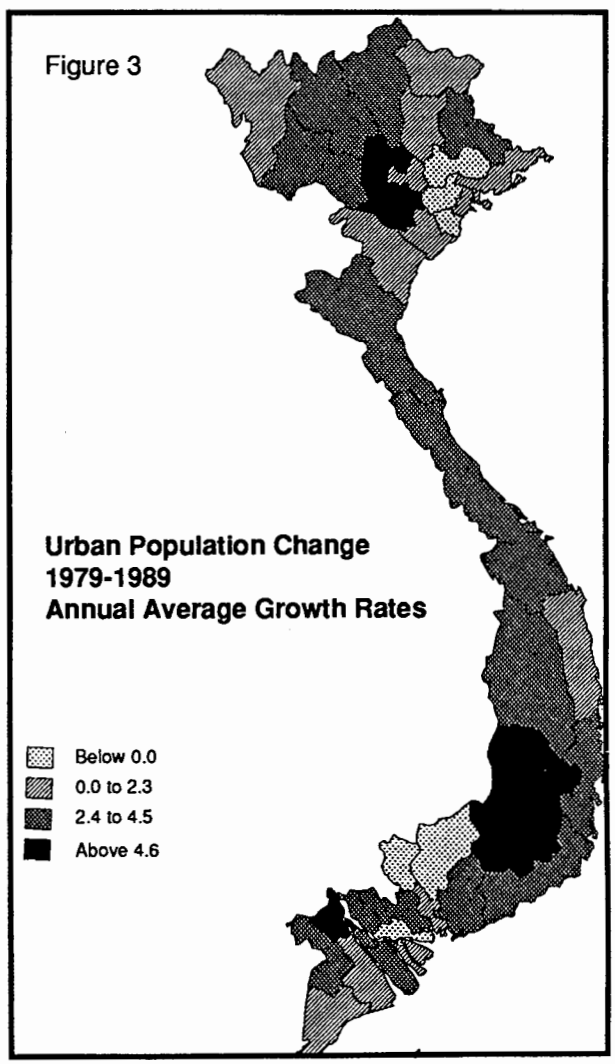
Table 2. Urban Primacy Indices

Primacy Indices	1979	1982	1985	1989
Two-city	0.36	0.32	0.32	0.33
Four-city	0.43	0.40	0.40	0.41

Source: As for Table 1.

Hanoi and its hinterland, particularly the corridor linking the city to the major port at Haiphong, will be a high priority growth region for Vietnam in coming years. A lesser corridor will link Haiphong with the city of Hong Gai to the north east, the gateway to the famous Vietnamese tourist destination of Ha Long Bay. It is recognised that Ho Chi Minh City will initially be more attractive to overseas investors, but a new passenger terminal has recently been opened at Hanoi's Noi Bai airport, reflecting increased attention to the infrastructure linking the city to the outside world.

However, the roads in this important part of the country are mostly in need of rehabilitation and repair, and presently constitute an impediment to the linkages that are necessary between a city and its hinterland. Viet Tri is the capital of Vinh Phu Province, to the north west of Hanoi. Being close to the temples of the Hung kings, and the mountain resort of Tam Dao, Viet Tri is encouraging the development of its tourist industry. So too is Vinh Yen, a smaller town located nearby, which has constructed a resort beside an artificial lake, in an attempt to lure tourists travelling between Hanoi and Tam Dao. Both towns face the same problem, though, of not being able to capitalise upon potential tourist growth because of the poor transport links between Hanoi and its hinterland.



Source: Based on data in Census Steering Committee, 1990

Ho Chi Minh City

Ho Chi Minh City had an urban population of 3.2 million in 1989, though its rural hinterland is smaller than Hanoi and contains 0.8 million, giving the agglomeration a total population of 4 million. Its urban population growth rate between 1979 and 1989 of 1.6 percent per annum was slower than Hanoi's rate of 2 percent, but both are well below the average for the large cities of Southeast Asia, which are generally growing at rates of between 3 and 4 percent per year. The city has a floating population of as many as 300,000. So far most are being accommodated by friends and relatives, or are renting small spaces. This means that the large squatter settlements that characterise other Southeast Asian cities are not evident in Vietnam, although there are some signs of

shanties being established along some of the river banks.

Homelessness still exists in Ho Chi Minh City, and could well be on the increase. There are more beggars on the streets than during my last visit seven years ago. One view is that many beggars are peasants seeking to supplement subsistence production with additional cash income acquired during the off-season, but it is unlikely this can explain more than a few of the people who beg in the streets. Hanoi is less affected, but the contrast from a few years ago when no homeless were apparent on the streets, is even more marked.

The growth of small 'informal' enterprises is particularly noticeable in Vietnam at the present time. In the early 1980s there was no sign of street-side traders in Hanoi, though the same could not be said of Ho Chi Minh City, where many small-scale entrepreneurs had managed to survive. Small enterprises now line most streets, with new ones opening every day, causing even long-term residents to comment on the pace of change. The driving force of informal sector growth is the residents' need for multiple sources of income, combined with the sizeable floating population. Although a reflection of low incomes and underemployment, the informal sector adds greatly to the diversity of goods and services available in the city, improving the quality of living for residents.

Another major corridor of development is located in the south. It is the 120 kilometre long corridor connecting Ho Chi Minh City with the heavy industry centre of Bien Hoa, about 30 kilometres away to the north east, a Soviet built petrochemical complex near the district town of Long Thanh, and further industrial zones and ports planned for this south western corner of Dong Nai Province. Extensive rubber plantations are evident along the corridor. Vung Tau is a coastal port and ship-building centre, which attracts residents of Saigon to its long sandy ocean beaches. As part of the corridor development, Vung Tau will expand both its industrial base and tourist potential.

Danang

Danang is the third largest city in Vietnam, with a population of 525,000 in 1989 and a growth rate superior to that of either Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City. Located in central Vietnam, the corridor linking Danang and Hue is the third major growth centre of the country. As such it is intended as a major focus for foreign investment. The infrastructure in and around Danang is reasonably good, and the airport has been, in theory at least, upgraded to international standard.

Hue was the capital of Vietnam during the Nguyen Dynasty, which existed from the early nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth century, and still retains the artifacts of its imperial role. The area around Danang is well endowed with natural features, particularly along the coast. Inevitably, therefore, tourism will be a major focus of economic development in the region. However, the need for Vietnam to spatially concentrate resources means that the Danang-Hue corridor will remain a lesser priority than Ho Chi Minh City or Hanoi.

Conclusion

If Vietnam continues its path towards economic reform and renovation it will prove increasingly difficult for its planners to maintain the pattern of urban development of the last decade. First, the indications are that much greater emphasis will be given to Ho Chi Minh City and its surrounding satellites in an attempt to provide the urban infrastructure that will attract foreign investment. Second, it seems likely that rates of urbanisation will escalate, increasing the pressures on the existing urban areas to provide employment, housing, transport and other urban services, while preserving significant elements of the urban architectural heritage.

These are vital new tasks for Vietnam's urban planners and have the potential to contribute

significantly to economic renovation. Most importantly this will require a reformulation of the planners' role in Vietnam, with more emphasis being given to strategic socio-economic planning and increased stress being placed upon the appraisal of proposals for new publicly funded infrastructure.

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