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**Organisational Adventures in District  
Government: Central Control Versus Local  
Initiative in Long An Province, Vietnam**

Natalie Hicks

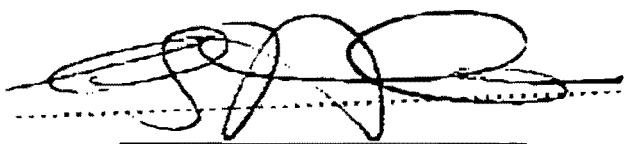
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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of The Australian National  
University



I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree in the same or other form to any other university.

Natalie Hicks

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12 May 2005

## Abstract

Most studies of sub-national government in rural Vietnam have focused on the commune and province level governments. This dissertation is an examination of district (*huyen*) government. It shows that the district was important to the central government both before the Communist victory in 1975 and afterwards and that the district level has remained a primary interface between the villagers and higher authorities. This study also examines tensions between central governments' attempts to control rural areas and localist tendencies that exist within district administrations.

The dissertation focuses on selected districts in Long An province in the Mekong Delta during three periods: the wartime South Vietnamese regime, which existed below the seventeenth parallel from 1955 until its defeat by the Communists in 1975; the late 1970s and 1980s when the Communist government in Hanoi pursued a district-building campaign; and the reform era of the 1990s. Under the South Vietnamese regime and in the pre-reform era of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, local initiative was stifled as policy was dictated by the central government, with disastrous consequences. Most literature on this subject emphasises a sharp break between pre-1975 and post-1975 Vietnam. By contrast, this dissertation highlights the way in which there are important elements of continuity between both regimes in terms of central government measures to control district government through administrative re-organisation and top-down policy implementation.

In the reform era, the dynamics of central regulation versus district control have changed. The district government now has greater latitude to develop innovative

'local' approaches to agricultural development. Using a state-in-society approach that is generous enough to avoid definitive boundaries between state and society, the study examines how district officials have been joined by 'associates of the state', particularly agricultural extension officers, who act as a link between state and societal objectives. This interaction has contributed to increased prosperity for many villagers while also raising inequality. The study also shows that while the central government has been more willing to allow local experimentation during the reform era, its influence and interests are still felt at the district level.

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## Glossary of Terms

ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
<i>Bao Chi Long An</i>	Provincial newspaper of Long An province
COSVN	Central Office for South Vietnam
DBSCL	<i>Dong Bang Song Cua Long</i> (Mekong Delta)
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
DTM	Dong Thap Muoi (special ecological area in the east of Long An province)
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
<i>Giay phep</i>	Permission letter
GVN	Government of South Vietnam
HES	Hamlet Evaluation Scheme
HTXNN	<i>Hop tac xa Nong nghiep</i> (agricultural collective organisation)
IPM	Integrated Pest Management
IZ	Industrial Zone
<i>Khuyen Nong</i>	Agricultural Extension
LTDSX	<i>Lien tap doan San xuat</i> (agricultural collective organisation)
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
NEZ	New Economic Zone
NLF	National Liberation Front
NLH	New Life Hamlets
<i>Nong Vien</i>	Commune Agricultural Extension Officer
PAR	Public Administration Reform
PRG	People's Revolutionary Government
QDS	Quasi-Democratic State

SRV	Socialist Republic of Vietnam
TDSX	<i>Tap doan San xuat</i> (agricultural collective organisation)
TTKN	<i>Trung tam Khuyen nong</i> (Provincial Agricultural Extension Centre)
T&V	Train and Visit meeting
UNDP	United National Development Programme
VAC	<i>Vuon, Ao, Chuong</i> (garden, pond, animal enclosure)
VC	<i>Viet Cong</i> (South Vietnamese Communist)