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### Bookreview [Review of: T.A. Rambo (2005) Searching for Vietnam: Selected Writings on Vietnamese Culture and Society]

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villages, and equally little about what Jim Glassman calls the “internationalized” state, driven by elite-based transnational alliances with shared assumptions about policy making.

Soviet-bloc Vietnam, in the era of collectivization, was an internationalized state with a vengeance. Hanoi planners attempted to remake its landscape into “territorial-productive complexes,” an exotic notion invented by Soviet geographers in 1941, for which there were at least five different, and contested, Vietnamese translations. Their desperate search for external oracles in the Soviet bloc led them to borrow land-management inspirations from the Estonian national land law of 1970, and the Bulgarian farmland law of 1973. Worst of all, competing Hanoi ministries hired planning agencies elsewhere in the Soviet bloc to prepare programmes for them, using scarce foreign currency to do so, and then failed to circulate the proposals to rival parts of the government. This was a precociously “internationalized” state whose extraordinary fragmentation at the top surely facilitated the “everyday politics” that Kerkvliet so brilliantly retrieves for us.

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ALEXANDER WOODSIDE

**SEARCHING FOR VIETNAM: Selected Writings on Vietnamese Culture and Society.** By *A. Terry Rambo*. *Kyoto (Japan) : Kyoto University Press; Melbourne, Vic. (Australia): Trans Pacific Press. 2005. xix, 456 pp. (Tables, graphs.) US\$79.95, cloth. ISBN 1-920901-05-1.*

This volume brings together in one book much of what the author has written about Vietnam over the past forty years. After the introduction, the book is divided into five parts: Vietnamese culture; the Vietnamese village; the impact of the war on South Vietnamese society; Vietnam’s development prospects in the reform period; and problems of development in Vietnam’s mountains.

The lengthy introduction reveals an intellectual journey that the author has taken since his somewhat troubled inception into the area study of Vietnam in the 1960s. His arrival during wartime under a contract for ARPA, the Advanced Research Projects Agency of the US Defense Department, made him extremely vulnerable to criticism from concerned Asian scholars. The author concludes that if he had known the terrible consequences that the American engagement would have had for both countries he might have taken a different path. Reading his reports and articles about the refugee movement and the situation in villages in South Vietnam, some of which are being published for the first time here, one gets the impression that Rambo’s one-sided scholarship at the time was based on a genuine, if rather naïve, effort to understand the Vietnamese. We will never know what would have happened if he had revealed the atrocities of the ROK troops in Binh Dinh before My Lai exploded in the face of the policy makers.

From this introduction, the reader gets the impression that the author was caught in a highly technocratic approach of practicing positivist sociology at the time. His lifetime friendship with Neil Jamieson at least made him very sensitive to the cultural body and soul of the (South)-Vietnamese, but also undermined his faith in the single truth-content of the outcomes of the many surveys he undertook in several parts of southern Vietnam during the war.

The current collection of articles covers a vast number of topics, each of which calls for a separate review. A short review of this book leads to a blurred focus upon what the reviewer estimates as important or interesting. Here we have a concise version of Rambo's writings, useful to readers lacking easy access to the majority of his articles and reports about so many aspects of Vietnamese history, culture and development. Rambo's attempt to design a paradigmatic approach to Vietnam's peasant social organization in terms of a typology of open and closed village communities is clearly inspired by his interest in ecological processes. To him, the ideal-typical Vietnamese village embodies an adaptation to the natural and social environments in both parts of Vietnam, in the Red River and the Mekong delta. The author admits that new anthropological research would make him write his studies differently today, but he sticks to the basic pattern he identified during his study of the Vietnamese village. Yet unlike Eric Wolf, who was criticized for his earlier work, including his daring comparisons between Latin America and Java, Rambo leaves us in the dark about the historical development of the Vietnamese village, also a product of colonial, nationalist and communist producers of development projects.

Rambo's fieldwork in the Northern uplands is thoroughly discussed in *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 67, 2, 1994, pp. 307-309. The four articles reprinted in this book mainly address development prospects in the period after 1986, when Vietnam embarked on a mixed economy path that is sometimes referred to as market socialism, but basically is an attempt to combine the political power of the Communist Party with a fast-growth scenario. Rambo reveals a very pessimistic view of this growth: corruption, growing differentiation in wealth, and social alienation are all now recognized as being major problems for Vietnamese society (p. 244).

This volume of collected articles is recommended. Some are suitable for novices to the field, like the overview of Vietnamese religious currents. Others require more background knowledge from the reader. *Searching for Vietnam* can be read separately and provides readers with valuable information and insights. The introduction presents a truly comprehensive attempt at soul-searching by a scholar who creatively adapted to the various stages of Vietnam's modernization. There is something in this book for everyone interested in Vietnam as a country (rather than as a war).

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