

**Strong**

**WIND**

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE  
HANOI — 1962

# STRONG WIND



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FOR THE FISHING BOAT  
MAY - 1902

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Over the last seven years, since the cessation of the hostilities in Indo-China, the peasants in North Viet Nam have taken a big stride forward.

By liquidating the exploitation of man by man in the countryside, land reform contributed to bring out the essential character of private land ownership, but only brought about a slight raising in the peasants' living standards without opening real prospects for their future improvement.

It rests with co-operation to get rid of the restrictions of private ownership and pave the way to progress. As a result, production and output have been boosted. The peasants in North Viet Nam whose life was for centuries a constant struggle against famine, can now eat their fill, and dress themselves decently, not in rags as in former times, have a home which no doubt is still a little crude but already decent. Illiteracy being liquidated, a seven-year schooling has been established in villages and the embryo of an agro-technical education is taking shape.

This sudden change does not proceed without giving rise to contradictions. It can be brought about only at



*the cost of sustained efforts and one cannot help emphasizing its deep impact on the thinking of the peasants and on the atmosphere of rural life.*

*The articles and notes included in this small collection show some features of rural life in North Viet Nam today in its advance towards socialism.*

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## BACK TO MY VILLAGE

by HOAI THANH

**A**FTER nearly thirty years, this is the first time I have the opportunity to return to my village, except for very short visits. My father died long ago and my mother passed away when I was a child; my brothers and sisters are scattered. I walk on the sandy road of my village, remembering the past, a past not only remote in time but also because of the great changes which have taken place.

From afar I can see the tops of bamboo-trees planted behind old gardens, the bamboo-trees so dear to me. When I left my village for the first time to study in town and saw these bamboo-trees swinging behind me, I could not keep back the tears. I thought that, in a life of deceit and spitefulness, only in my village could I find some affection. Now life has changed and so has my way of looking at things, but these bamboo-trees still have their place in my heart.

I remember every bamboo bush, every ricefield and every bend of the road. I step in my old garden: my house is no more; few trees planted by my father remain. But in that new framework I distinctly remember all the past things, so much so that my recollection is more accurate than my vision, and old pictures clearer than the scenery which is unfolding before my eyes. I remember the guava-trees on the water's edge, the well in a corner of the garden from which I drew refreshing water to bathe, the convolvulus hedge at the entrance door, my little brother who ran out to give me a sweet; I remember the lilacs which at springtime gave us flowers with which we made a violet necklace, the bushes of arrow-roots at the rear of the house where the birds built their nests, the bamboo bed on which my mother passed away, the table at which my father used to read, and the kind faces which are no more.

But my old acquaintances do not let me give full swing to my thoughts. Though I am a stranger to them, the children still greet me according to a very gentle custom of the country. Even some grown-ups take time to recognize me. How many old and new stories have we to tell each other!

Few people of my age are alive, a great many died in the famine at the beginning of 1945\*. There were most tragic cases of death. San was a good-looking, stout, intelligent and skilful boy but could not afford

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\* Owing to the policy of cornering paddy by French and Japanese colonialists a famine carried off nearly two million people in North Viet Nam.

to go to school. He had taken part in World War One as a French mercenary. Upon his return from France, he always felt the pinch. In that period he went hungry for days on end and was exhausted. Before dying, he took a mirror from a neighbour and looked into it for the last time, saying, "I did not believe that, having such a bright face, I was doomed to die of starvation." Tinh, another lad, hungry, was caught in the act of digging sweet potatoes and had his hands burnt by the owner of the potato field. He died from his wounds.

On hearing these stories, my old life appears higgledy-piggledy in my mind: I think of naked children, with big bellies and skinny backsides, of people in rags and tatters, of scabby evil-doers who pestered the debtors on behalf of the creditors living at Vinh (these ruffians sat at the highest spot in the debtor's house and if the latter died, they jumped onto the roof of his house and shouted curses); I think of the estates of well-to-do families thickly surrounded by bamboo-bushes and watched by packs of dogs more cruel than tigers; of the local despots, French customs agents, security men, legionaries who were more cruel than the dogs of the rich. In addition there was a supernatural world full of deities and ghosts, long and dark temples guarded by tall and austere generals who could not check world events but were however a constant threat to the honest villagers and the little ones. As for the ghosts they existed everywhere.

Of course, the old life did not have such things only, because, if it had, how could the Nghe Tinh

Soviet uprising have taken place, the August 1954 Insurrection be brought to a victorious end and the resistance and national construction be successful? But at that time I was blindfold. These dark shadows weighed heavily upon me during a span of my life, especially upon my thinking when I was young. That is why though I do not regret my past, I bet one thousand times that I am not willing to return to my old life. These dark shadows are now mingling in my mind with the dearest memories of my childhood. On my way back to my native village, in fancy I have gone back to my past which in truth is still deep-rooted in me. My way of looking at things has undergone many changes but concerning my village it seems to remain where it was. I imagine that I have slept soundly these thirty years and realize now that life around me is subjected to many great changes.

The cruellest local despots had to pay their debts, the French customs-agents and security men, the legionaries and the debt collectors are no more to be seen in my village; the temple, which made my flesh creep when I passed by, is now a spacious general-education school surrounded by a garden with cassava and sweet potatoes; all kinds of ghosts have left the village for ever; even the dogs are harmless.

Several years ago I thought that my province was the poorest in the country, my district the poorest in the province and my village the poorest in the district. Now in production as well as in other activities, my village is like thousands of others in North Viet Nam. Still its lower-level co-operative has grown two crops only. The

1961 autumn crop was bad, and during the pre harvest period of March last, many families in the hamlet met with difficulties. Owing to the good 1961-1962 Winter-Spring crop the situation is better. But in the coming pre-harvest period some families will still have to eat more sweet potatoes than rice. The general living standard is not yet high, but compared with the former wretched life it has undergone many changes. Ragged clothes are very few, almost all the villagers have cotton-padded coats, and the children begin to wear fine printed garments. Formerly, when children learnt a little by the oil lamp, their parents regarded it as a luxury, now the lamps can be kept lit far into the night. Formerly a needle was put in safety in the stem of a cock's or duck's feather, now with five cents one can buy a lot of them. I have paid a visit to Mrs. Quy, a poor peasant and a next-door neighbour. When putting her house in order, she noticed her daughter's scent-bottle and held it up. Previously she had never seen perfume used.

The objective of the peasants in North Viet Nam in the First Five-Year Plan is to reach the present living standard of the upper middle peasants. Some people may be disappointed with that none-too-brilliant prospect but it has been the aspiration of millions of people from time immemorial.

Under the leadership of the Party of the working class, the inhabitants of my village are progressing. They are now sovereign people, have land to till and work in co-operatives. In this big leap forward, they encountered difficulties, and even now everything is

not smooth running. But compared with the former times there is a very great difference. Previously, there was only one four-year general education school in the whole district, now each village has its own. There are three seven-year general education schools in the district and at the beginning of September next a ten-year school will be opened. In my hamlet alone there are eight teachers of the four-year school, most of them under twenty. Compared with the former teachers they have a good point: able to do manual labour. Formerly, when attending a seven-year school one became a kind of little mandarin in the village. At present many of those who attend the morning classes carry manure and cut grass in the afternoon. The co-operative to which I have paid a visit has no library yet, the co-op members have not enough money to buy many books but they exchange books. Even those who have not yet attended a seven-year school manage to read much. A youth who has not the possibility to go to school has read up to sixty novels, including "How the Steel was Tempered", "On the Oder", "Les Misérables", which he relates to his mates as they collect firewood.

But the biggest school is still the practical school of the Resistance war and reconstruction in peace time. Despite the short distance between my village and the provincial town most of the villagers had not yet been there. Now on careful inquiry it is found that almost all of them were civilian workers at the battlefronts of Binh Tri Thien or the Third zone, Nghia Lo, Dien Bien Phu,

which has raised their understanding. Once at a meeting of co-op members I heard them speak clearly and to the point. I particularly noticed a middle-aged man who looked like one of my acquaintances of yore. In fact he was the latter's son. The day I left the village he was a sickly child, with a big belly and skinny backside, who crawled on the ground all day long. Now he was a member of the Executive Committee of the Party cell. One might think that the father had come to life again. But the cultural level is quite different from that of former days. The son was laying before the meeting the plan for making green compost. The next morning the inhabitants, with flag ahead, went to the mountain five kilometres from the hamlet to gather green compost.

The clearest thing noticed in my village after thirty years of separation is that young men are rising like new waves. They know everything about ricefield, hamlet and village, and are grasping culture, and mastering their life. Even the people of the old generation seem to grow young again. Mrs. Ich, Mrs. Thoi, old Ham and some of my former neighbours who have endured nearly half a century of hardships are now well clad and merry-looking though they have to work the whole day — carrying their nephews, sweeping the yard, feeding the pigs. When I met them, some invited me to dinner, others gave me some oranges or asked me to have boiled sweet potatoes or pea-nuts. Old Ham much regretted not having time to make sweet potato cakes for me to bring to Hanoi.



A hard life which lasted many centuries is now changing to light and vitality. It is certain that in other localities, the achievements are still greater, but I have never seen such a marvellous thing as the changes brought by the revolution to my native village.

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