

## Introduction from the Guest Editor

### Forays into the Field of Vietnamese Military Technology

This volume, *Forays into the Field of Vietnamese Military Technology*, is the first issue of *East Asian Science, Technology, and Medicine* to focus on any aspect of Vietnamese science, technology, or medicine. The timing of this issue is particularly apt as it follows Marta Hanson's review article in *EASTM* 19 entitled "New Directions in the History of Science in East Asia." This issue, *Forays*, clearly indicates a geographic expansion of the journal's publications on East and Southeast Asia and can be considered a 'foray' into new territory for *EASTM*. Although papers on Vietnamese topics were presented at the conferences held by the International Society for History of East Asian Science, Technology, and Medicine in Seoul and in Shanghai and although there was an entire panel on Vietnam, organized by Alexei Volkov, in Singapore this is the first time that articles on Vietnamese science, technology, or medicine have been published in the Society's journal. In the words of Hans Ulrich Vogel this opens "a new venue on a neglected region."<sup>1</sup>

Here I would like to take this opportunity to thank those who acted as outside readers of these essays. Their generously provided insights and suggestions were crucial to the reworking of these papers and all of the essays are the better for their comments. I would also like to thank Hans Ulrich Vogel and the various staff members who have worked on the *Forays* issue at Tübingen. I tested the care and patience of Professor Vogel and his staff repeatedly yet they remained supportive of the effort to bring this issue to press. *Forays* will feature articles by George Dutton, Marilyn Larew, and Nguyễn Thế Anh. All are scholars who have worked on Vietnam, in various areas within Vietnamese Studies, for many years and it has been my pleasure as guest editor to have had the opportunity to collaborate with each of them to bring this issue together.

For many, perhaps most, people who came of age at any point in time during and after World War II the first meaning of the word Vietnam is war, rather than a place, a country, a people or a culture. Since scholars who work on Vietnam have been attempting to rectify this situation for several decades it may seem odd that the first issue of *EASTM* devoted to Vietnamese science, technology, or medicine should focus on Vietnamese military technology. Although this particular emphasis is to some extent accidental it is also serendipitous. These articles clearly illustrate that, at this point in time, it is possible to write on military technology in Vietnam with the Vietnamese themselves as primary actors and with the scholarly discussions of this topic revolving around issues relating to Vietnamese culture and technology rather than to political arguments concerning the united States. Further, all four of these articles address a question which has

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<sup>1</sup> Personal communication 9/27/2000.

dominated Vietnamese Studies, in its broadest sense, since before the field existed outside of Vietnam.

This question is the matter of borrowing, adoption and adaptation if you will, of elements of culture from other societies and geographic regions. Within Vietnamese Studies this is a question that scholars in any field of study who make any claim to examine questions of cultural change must address. In fields as disparate as Anthropology<sup>2</sup> and Zoomorphism<sup>3</sup> scholars doing research on things Vietnamese wrestle with the question of the significance of adoption and adaptation of foreign items and ideas.

Marilynn Larew takes a fresh look at the first person living in the geographic area which is now Vietnam whose name is known to history, Thục Phán, and discusses the physical evidence available from his citadel at Cổ Loa for the theory that when Thục Phán arrived he brought with him important new, to the ancient Vietnamese, elements of military technology. George Dutton's focus is on "the evolution of locally developed military technologies" and he gives a sophisticated overview of important elements of Vietnamese military technology, training, and tactics. Dutton also discusses the incorporation of foreign technology and comes to the interesting conclusion that for most of Vietnamese history while technology, both foreign and indigenous, was certainly important that strategy and the Vietnamese "knowledge of their own topography have arguable been of even greater significance." Nguyễn Thế Anh makes the question of "Incorporation of External Cultural and Technical Contributions" the theme of his article with a focus on the factors that have shaped the Vietnamese response to the possibilities and dangers offered by foreign military technology whether physical, organizational or strategic. While one hesitates to condense the conclusions of an article of this wide ranging one can say that the author implies that the Vietnamese are at their best when they are confident enough to be open to adapting foreign ideas to their own needs and that perhaps it is a dangerous point when "Ambivalence and Ambiguity" dominate the Vietnamese response. Michele Thompson's article examines the tensions between traditional Vietnamese healers and western, French, trained physicians in the nationalist movement of the early twentieth century and at the development of a mutually respectful relationship between the two groups which set the stage for the organization of a military medical corps for the Vietminh towards the end of World War II.

*EASTM* is a forum for research on the history of science, technology, and medicine and these four articles fall directly under that purview. In these days when it is acknowledged by most if not all that any history of science, technology, or medicine must be set in its proper context it is also appropriate that the articles in this issue lie equally within the field of Vietnamese Studies. This issue

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Neil L. Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> See Huỳnh Sanh Thông et al., "The Beast of the Year Bính Dần" (Year of the Tiger) *The Vietnam Forum* 7 (1986), 2-9.

is the first ‘foray’ for *EASTM* into the history of Vietnamese science, technology, and medicine; however, it is my sincere hope that many more articles and whole issues of *EASTM* will be devoted in the future to Vietnamese topics and that this issue will provoke interest in matters connected to history of science, technology, and medicine within the community of scholars working on Vietnam and interest in matters Vietnamese on the part of scholars working on Asian science, technology, and medicine.

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