



CLOSING REMARKS



INTERACTION FOR PROGRESS: VIETNAM'S NEW COURSE AND ASEAN EXPERIENCES

*Ramon Mitra**

We Filipinos understand only too well Vietnam's economic problems, which his Excellency Phan Van Khai discussed so candidly at the opening session.

For there are remarkable parallels in the recent histories of our two countries.

For instance, the American intervention in Vietnam in the early 1960's was foreshadowed by the American intervention in the Philippines in 1898 -- after the Filipinos had defeated Spain and proclaimed colonial Asia's first free republic.

When we look back, the Filipino-American war of 1899-1902 now seems like some mad dentist's laboratory - where the strategies and cruelties of war - like "hamletting" and the "after cure" as inflicted on Indochina 60 years later were invented.

When our national legislature in 1966 debated whether to give then-President Marcos the authority to send Filipino troops to Vietnam to fight on the side of the American forces, I asked my colleagues in the House of Representatives whether it could be that the "Vietcong", we were sending our troops to fight against, were patriots defending their nations as our forefathers did -- instead of the bandits and anarchists the Americans said they were.

But I am glad the Philippines and Vietnam had experiences -- so much alike in many ways that ended differently. We Filipinos lost the guerrilla war that killed over a quarter-million of us -- almost four percent of our entire population.

The Vietnamese, as we all know, hung on for nine full years -- until their incredible sacrifice was repaid with victory.

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Another kind of adversary - against poverty and underdevelopment-is one of the reasons I have come here to find out; what is it in the Vietnamese character that we Filipinos can cultivate -- so that we can ensure that this time we shall not be defeated.

While the challenge of Vietnam's economic stabilisation, renovation and institutional reforms may be formidable, I have no doubt the tenacious and courageous Vietnamese people will prevail once again.

For the elements of development are all here; rich natural resources and a good agricultural base; a hardworking and disciplined people; a strong and self-confident leadership; and the goodwill of neighboring countries.

Of course we in the Philippines fully support the efforts of scholars and government officials to effect greater economic cooperation among the countries of our region. But we all have come to discover the national market linkage and complementation we all want to encourage.

Despite ASEAN's rather limited success in government sponsored trade enhancement and industrial complementation schemes, private businessmen have initiated what Dr Tan Kong Yam calls "a web of linkages and networks" which is building up trust, good will and solidarity among our different countries.




One recent example is the joint venture between Filipino businessmen and the Vietnamese government for the production of automobiles and buses, which was concluded just a few days ago.

Filipino professionals, too, have come here to share their expertise with their Vietnamese counterparts.

I feel we, who are in government, can best help accelerate this process by simply removing the legal and bureaucratic impediments to it. And I am sure the private sector will do the rest.

We, the countries of Southeast Asia, are ideal trading and economic partners. We have been so for a thousand years.

In our country until now, we are turning up evidence of this historical trade in porcelain and other artifacts from China, Thailand and Vietnam, which our people loved so much that they buried them with their dead.



Southeast Asia Beyond 2000 Towards Regional Reconciliation

We can help each other without domination or interfering in each other's internal affairs. And we can help each other while learning from each other.

This symposium has been characterised by what we Filipinos call "*pakikisama*"-- an all purpose word which describes comradeship sharing, compassion, concern for each other, and mutual help.

While other countries wait we are doing what we can. And that is the main thing - to do what we can for each other and for our region as a whole.

Let us show the rest of the world that in this region, we know what true cooperation means.